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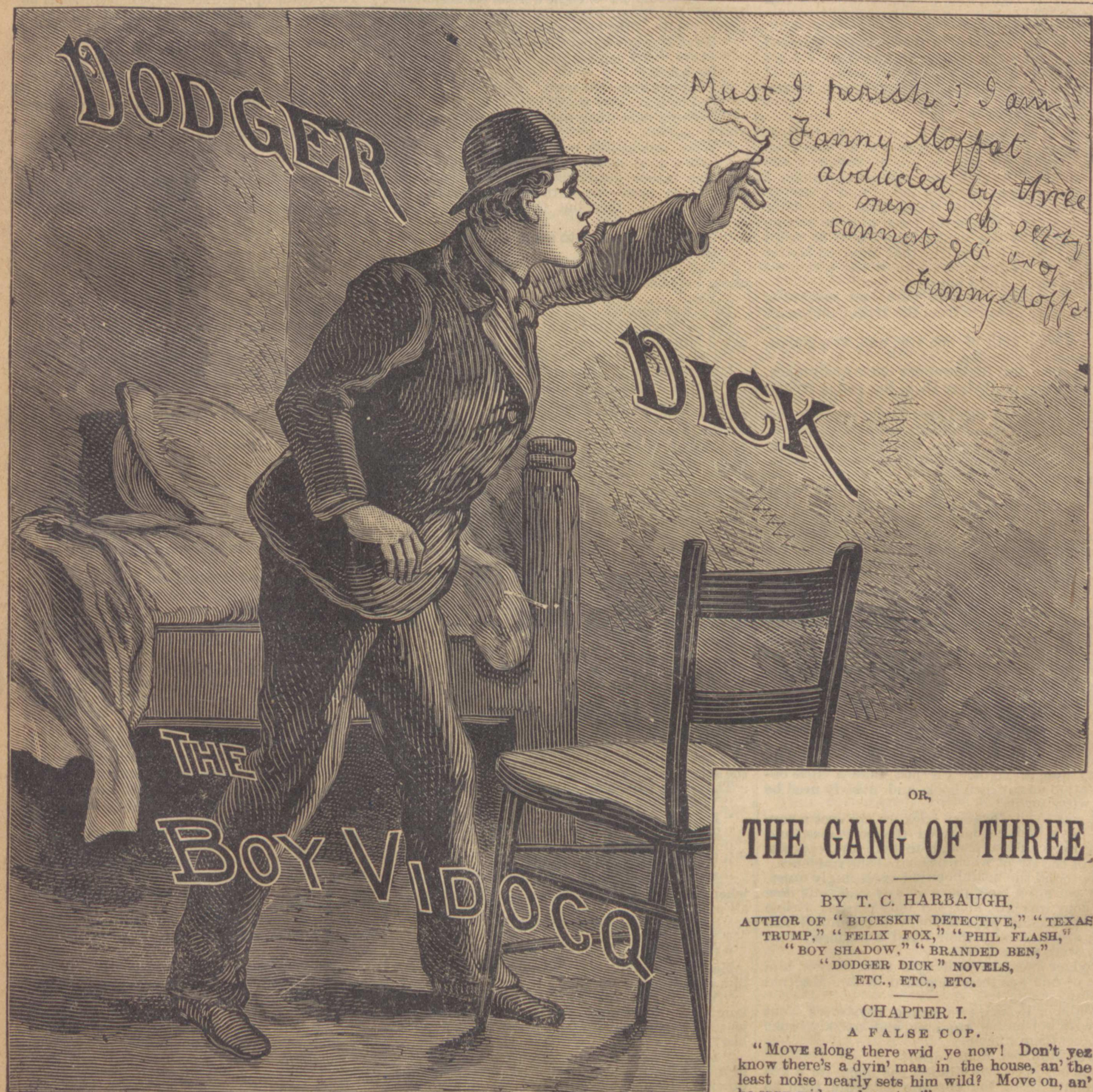
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HE LEANED FORWARD AND HELD HIS LITTLE TORCH SO AS TO REVEAL MORE CLEARLY THE MESSAGE HE HAD DISCOVERED.

OR, THE GANG OF THREE.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "TEXAS TRUMP," "FELIX FOX," "PHIL FLASH,"
"BOY SHADOW," "BRANDED BEN,"
"DODGER DICK" NOVELS,
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FALSE COP.

"MOVE along there wid ye now! Don't yez know there's a dyin' man in the house, an' the least noise nearly sets him wild? Move on, an' be spry wid yer legs, too!"

These words fell from the tongue of an Irish-looking policeman, one summer night in the

Dodger Dick, the Boy Vidocq.

heart of New York, and were addressed to two boys who were talking together as they moved leisurely past the house guarded by the "cop."

One of the boys—a bright-eyed, well-built fellow—looked up at the patrolman, only to be again admonished to "move on."

"Come along, Dick. We don't want to disturb a man's last moments."

"Of course not, Larry. I wouldn't do that for the world. But I was looking at that cop."

"What attracts you?"

"I don't like him."

"An old enemy, eh?"

"No; I don't think I ever saw him before. Of course I do not pretend to know all the cops of New York, but that one puzzles me."

"He has the brogue of the sod," laughed the other.

"Yes; but did you notice that a good deal of it seemed to be put on?"

"No."

"It struck me that way. He talked rather loud for the guardian of a dying man. We were not making one-half the noise he made. Did you notice the number of the house, Larry? The light struck the door, you know."

"I saw the number—I could not help it. It was 332."

"That is right, and I happen to know who lives at 332."

"Do you, though?"

"It is the home of a man named Manfred Moffat. He is the father, or guardian, I don't know which, of a very beautiful young girl. I made his acquaintance in a very singular manner last summer."

"At his house?"

"No, in the Park. He is subject to vertigo. I happened to be the first person at his side when he had one of his attacks, and by following the directions of the girl, who was his companion, I rendered assistance which made him grateful. I have met him several times since, but not for a long time. Whenever I saw him he was accompanied by the young miss whom he called Fanny. Now, if it be true that Manfred Moffat is dying in his fine house, I know the girl must be very sorry, and I am sorry, too."

By this time the two boys had reached a corner some distance from the Irish policeman's beat.

They were both of one size, and, at a glance, resembled one another.

The one called Dick was our old acquaintance, Richard Sly, or Dodger Dick, the young wharf-spy of the city.

His companion was Larry Long, a youth who had developed some talents as a boy shadow, and the two had worked together successfully on several short trails with which it is not necessary to bother the reader.

The hour was verging onto midnight when the boy detectives separated on the corner.

Dodger Dick was making for Mother Sturgeon's, his old quarters, and when he bade Larry good-night with a promise to see him early the following day, he walked rapidly toward his home quarters.

"I can't get that Moffat affair out of my head," murmured the Boy Vidocq, slackening his gait. "That cop seemed a little *too* anxious to keep people away from the house, and he pitched his voice in too high a key to accord with his business there—to keep the neighborhood quiet for a dying man."

The Dodger did not walk much further till he stopped and hesitated.

"I'm going back to survey the field, anyhow," he continued. "Larry is going home, and I need not tell him about my return if I find everything all right. I'll just take a little observation on my own hook, and nobody need be the wiser for it."

It was some distance back to the spot where the boys had encountered the policeman, and Dick was cautious enough to take the opposite side of the street when he neared the residence.

He found the neighborhood exceedingly quiet.

It was not a busy place at any time, but now the hour was late, and the only persons visible were occasional pedestrians who resembled flitting specters, only their tread announced that they were abroad.

Dodger Dick's shrewd eyes soon showed him that no one was then on guard before Manfred Moffat's house.

While he looked, two young roysterers went by with boisterous laughter, and nobody broke in upon their hilarity.

Was Manfred Moffat dead?

The boy detective studied the house for a few moments from the opposite sidewalk, then he crossed the street and took a nearer observation.

As far as he could see the house was dark. The shutters were closely drawn, and there was no light in the hall. Everything indicated that something unusual had taken place. Was it death?

Dick did not like to linger about the place, yet he was eager to see beyond those closed portals.

He knew that the putting of a guard before a house occupied by a person dangerously sick was a common custom, but he could not get the pretentious cop out of his head.

As Dick had told Larry Long, he did not know all the police of New York; but here was one he ought to have heard of before.

Once or twice the boy detective advanced to the very steps of the dwelling, but each time he drew back undecided.

"If Manfred Moffat is dead, it wouldn't be proper for me to intrude at this hour," he argued with himself. "He barely knew me, anyhow, and the girl, Miss Fanny, probably has long since forgotten the boy who was of some assistance to her in the Park. I guess I won't try to get in. To-morrow will be time enough, and to-morrow isn't far off, anyhow."

Reaching a decision at last, the street sleuth went home.

"You should have come a little sooner," said Mother Sturgeon, whom he found waiting for him, in spite of the lateness of the hour.

"Have I been wanted?" asked the boy.

"There was a call for you."

"By whom?"

"I did not know the man."

"Did he leave any word?"

"Nothing more than saying that he would see you to-morrow."

"What was he like, mammy?"

"Like a good many men you see nowadays. He was rather large, had a smooth face and keen black eyes—one I thought was not quite as black as the other, but that may have been fancy."

"Was he very eager to see me?"

"He appeared so."

"And went off without breathing a word about his business, nor where I could find him?"

"Yes."

Dick was puzzled.

"You were looking for nobody like him?"

asked Mother Sturgeon.

"I was not. When was he here?"

"He went away about half an hour ago."

"Ho! a regular night-bird!" exclaimed the young Vidocq with a slight start. "Only thirty minutes gone? Then I missed him by going back to the house on G— street. Well, maybe I did not miss much!" he laughed. "Some of these important visits—important in the eyes of the persons who make them, I mean—never amount to much. If the fellow wants to see me to-morrow, he can hunt me up," and the Dodger disappeared in the little room where he slept.

But it was not immediate slumber for the young shadower. He lay awake a long time trying to connect the scene in front of Manfred Moffat's house with the visit of the stranger during his absence. There was, of course, nothing tangible by which he could connect them, but, somehow-or-other, the boy could not help bringing them together.

"I should have pulled the bell at 332," he exclaimed, and as he went to sleep the sentence was the last thought he had:

"I—should—have—pulled—that—bell!"

While the Dodger slept in his little quarters a man ran lightly up a flight of dimly lighted stairs in another quarter of the city, and entered a room where two men sat at a table beneath the soft light of a shaded jet.

They both looked up at the man's entrance.

"Well, what luck?" asked one.

"He was not at home."

"Then, of course, you did not find him?"

"I did not."

"What did the portress say?"

"Mamma Sturgeon? Oh, she did not know where he was, and said he was likely to stay out all night."

"She didn't suspect anything?"

"No."

"Did you leave any word for the boy?"

Nothing beyond the promise that I would see him to-morrow."

"Well, maybe we will!" and then all three laughed. "Of course you stick to it that it was the Dodger whom you saw with the other boy?"

"I do. I've seen him often enough to know him when he is not in borrowed feathers. The other boy I do not know so well, though I think he is a ferret like that infernal Dodger. We don't intend to let anybody get ahead of us, especially a

boy who ought to have had his neck twisted long ago."

"Of course not. We have done excellently so far. All we have to do is to keep our eyes open and to play a cool hand. That wins, I tell you—it always wins!"

Bright and beautiful the next morning broke on the spires of Gotham, and one of the first persons astir was Dick Sly.

"Now for the solution!" cried he as he stepped forth from Mother Sturgeon's comfortable rooms.

He did not go to Number 332 G— street, but to the police station of the district.

The officer on duty opened his eyes wide at sight of his early visitor.

"I want to know who did duty on Beat Number — last night," asked Dick.

"Patrolman Burns."

"That settles it!" cried the Dodger. "The Irish policeman was a fraud!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE TOILS.

DICK did not lose much time between the police station and Number 332 G— street.

He was very early for a caller when he ran up the steps and pulled the bell.

The outside appearance of the house was as he had seen it the night before; the shutters were close drawn and there was an air of mystery and desuetude about the place.

To his ring, which he repeated at short intervals, there was no response, and Dick got out of patience at last.

As he was about to retire to report the strange affair to the police he was saluted by a voice, and the next moment he found himself face to face with a young mulatto who stood at the foot of the steps.

"I think you're a little early for the folks inside," the man said to Dick. "I am the person who sees to their breakfast, and if you must get in, we'll try the basement."

The Dodger assented willingly to this suggestion, and in a moment the young cook had opened a door which invited them into the lowest story of the house.

"Mr. Moffat is a trifle hard of hearing," apologized the mulatto. "Miss Fanny was talking yesterday of going out of the city for a few days, something I never knew her to do, therefore your ring may not have been heard even if the old gentlemen is awake. Let us go up to the library. When he gets up he goes there directly."

The two ascended the steps together, the cook leading the way, and in a little time reached the first floor of the house.

Everything seen by Dick told that Manfred Moffat was a man of wealth. He had surrounded himself with "goods and chattels," which only an outlay of much money could have secured.

The boy detective saw the mulatto approach the library door on tiptoe, and open it softly as if fearful of incurring the displeasure of some one within.

While the closed shutters did not let in any light from the outside, there was some artificial light in the library.

As the cook crossed the threshold his hand still on the knob, he stopped suddenly and gave vent to a sharp cry.

Dick was at his side in an instant.

"Look! The master tied in a chair!" gasped the cook, clutching one of the boy's wrists while he pointed excitedly forward. "My God! a terrible crime has been committed here!"

It did not take Dick and the frightened cook long to reach the little table that stood under the chandelier in the middle of the room.

There, beside it, in a chair with heavy oaken arms, sat Manfred Moffat, the very picture of death.

He had been lashed to the chair with cords which held him completely a prisoner.

A rope kept his body upright against the back of the chair, and a gag which had probably been in his mouth all night keeping it open rendered the scene all the more ghastly.

"Cut him loose, quick!" was Dick's exclamation, and in a moment the mulatto's knife was at work.

As the last cord was severed the body of Manfred Moffat pitched forward and fell at full length on the floor in presence of the two startled spectators.

"If I had only investigated last night!" thought Dick, but it was no time for regrets, and he stooped over the body while his awestricken companion did not know what to do.

"This man isn't dead!" suddenly cried the Dodger. "There is a spark of life remaining and we may be able to fan it into a flame."

The cook was off like a rocket, and almost before Dodger Dick could realize his departure, he heard him quit the house by the front door.

The Boy Vidocq was thus left alone with Manfred Moffat, and he used the simple means within his power to restore the unfortunate man to consciousness.

Some water sprinkled over the face assisted in this direction, and the boy was at last rewarded by seeing an intelligent expression gradually assert itself in the glaring eyes.

He dragged Moffat to a sofa at one side of the room, and managed to get the limp body upon it.

By this time there were footsteps in the hall, and the family doctor, accompanied by a policeman, entered the room.

Dick recognized the officer at once.

"What have we here, Dick?" was the officer's question.

"A case of foul play of some kind."

"What do you think?"

"I have no opinion, sir," and Dick's look added plainly: "And if I had one I would not be likely to give it to you."

Under the doctor's hands Manfred Moffat progressed favorably toward consciousness, and when he was able to sit up the officer began to ply him with questions:

"In the first place, I want to know whether Fanny is safe?" said Moffat.

"Fanny?" echoed Dick starting forward. "Was she in the house last night? I thought—"

"She intended to take her little trip to-morrow," interrupted Moffat as if he guessed the unspoken part of the boy's sentence.

"Where is her room?"

"The second one to the right on the floor above."

The Dodger bounded from the room, leaving officer Nottaway and the doctor to follow if they liked.

A few springs carried him up the steps and the door designated by Manfred Moffat he found ajar.

The following moment he was looking into an empty boudoir, whose stand and bureau had evidently been ransacked, for the drawers stood open.

"Miss Fanny isn't here," exclaimed Dick. "It will be a hard blow for the old gentleman down-stairs, but he's got to hear it some time. And I want all he knows about the matter."

The young shadow went back to the library where he found Moffat awaiting him breathless and filled with anxiety.

"You need not tell me anything; Fanny is gone!" he said to Dick before the boy could deliver a report. "She is the prize for whom the villains came last night."

"They stole a march on you, Mr. Moffat?"

"Alas!" groaned the man. "Can I speak to the boy, doctor?"

The family physician nodded consent.

"They came in on me about ten o'clock while I was waiting at your table. I cannot tell how they succeeded in effecting an entrance without disturbing me. I heard the door open, but did not look up, for Fanny often came in unannounced for a book, and she would retire without disturbing me. All at once I was tapped on the shoulder by a hand which I knew did not belong to the girl, and when I looked up I was confronted by two masked men. In a moment I was in their hands. A stern voice commanded me to keep silence on peril of my life, and that silence was enforced by a revolver. I was lashed to the chair and gagged as you found me this morning. Not a word was spoken by the men during the process. The excitement of the moment and the pain occasioned by the stick in my mouth, soon brought on unconsciousness which might have resulted in death. Fanny, I know was in the house when the villains came, and I fear the worst when I realize that she is not here now."

Dodger Dick's words ended in a sigh.

"Of course you can give us no clew to your assailants?" questioned Dick.

"I only wish I could. The close-fitting black masks they wore entirely concealed their faces, and during their stay they did not drop a word calculated to betray them."

"That is bad," said Policeman Nottaway.

Dodger Dick did not speak.

"They must have entered the house by a skeleton key, for the front door was locked as usual early in the evening," resumed Mr. Moffat.

"Have you any enemies who would be likely to seek revenge in this manner?" put in Nottaway again.

"I hope not," was the rather evasive reply of which the Dodger took particular notice.

"These assaults on person and property are

becoming too common," observed the doctor. "The courts should deal severely with the offenders—"

"They can't till they catch them," broke in the policeman, with a wink at Dodger Dick, who was not in a humor for joking.

"This affair shall be reported at once," the officer continued, addressing Mr. Moffat. "The Department will do its utmost to bring the guilty to justice. The superintendent will put the best men under his command on the trail, and your child will be tracked down and restored."

"Do so and come to me for reward!" cried the afflicted man. "Leave no stone unturned that might interfere with success. I am willing to beggar myself to find Fanny and to beat the villains who invaded my house last night."

"It shall be done!"

Officer Nottaway uttered this assurance with a good deal of dignity calculated to impress Manfred Moffat and fill him with hope, and Dick saw that the words had such an effect.

When the policeman withdrew, the doctor made Mr. Moffat as comfortable as possible, and then took his departure.

Dick remained behind, despite Nottaway's look. A meanful glance from Moffat had held him back.

"I want you to take this case," the gentleman said to the Dodger whom he called to his side with a beck. "They tell me that you are a good young ferret on the trail. I will give you all the help I can, but there is a secret which I can't divulge now. My keeping it will make you hunt in the dark, but I can't help it. You will find a gang of desperate characters against you wherever you go—men who won't stop at anything. But go ahead. Can I depend on you, my boy?"

Dick answered resolutely:

"You can!"

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE SYLVA SEMPLE.

"THE first thing to be done," said the Dodger to himself, when he reached the street after his interview with Manfred Moffat, "is to get at that bogus policeman—the fellow who ordered Larry and I along last night. He made the third man of the party, though Mr. Moffat thinks there were but two. He knows nothing about the one who stood guard in official clothes on the outside, and kept the coast clear while the others did the real work. It was a cool game, well played, even to the minutest particular."

The young detective puzzled his brains a long time over the false cop, and at the end of several hours he was no nearer a solution than when he began.

As a matter of course the outrage at 332 G—street soon became the sensation of the day.

Within a short time after the discovery the house was besieged by people of all classes, reporters, detectives, and the simply curious.

Manfred Moffat's neighbors could hardly believe that such a thing had occurred under their very noses, and that while some of them were wide awake!

It seemed incredible, yet they had to believe the facts when they were presented in the startling garb they wore.

Officer Nottaway came back to the premises and officially took control of things there.

This man was above the medium height, stoutly built, and had a florid complexion. He was not very well liked by anybody, because of his overbearing manners, and many wondered why he was kept on the force.

But Nat Nottaway was fearless, and whenever there was dangerous work—a bad gang to be broken up, or something of that sort—he was pretty sure to have a hand in it.

He was not partial to reporters, and those who were sometimes compelled to go to him for information got very little.

It was getting late in the day when the officer entered the police station which Dick Sly had visited so early that morning.

"Here's a letter for you" said the lieutenant in charge, as he took a small envelope from his pocket and extended it.

"Who brought it?" asked Nottaway, who saw at a glance that it had not been intrusted to the mails.

"A little girl—about an hour ago."

The officer opened the envelope, and then he read the following:

"CAPTAIN NOTTAWAY:—We have heard of the strange affair on G—street. If you will not tell any one, and want some information about it, we may be able to help you out. Please come without your uniform, and don't come before six o'clock.

It may not be much news we have—it may not do you any good at all—but we are willing to tell you all we know. Please come as quietly as you can to

"No. 1212 R—street,

"Up the outside stairs,

"To the left."

Nat Nottaway read the letter twice before he took his eyes from the paper.

There was something honest about the wording of it, yet, he did not exactly like it.

He knew the vicinity of the house to which he had been invited, and its reputation was none of the best. Several times he had been called thither in the line of duty, and while he had become acquainted with the inmates of some of the buildings there, he knew nothing about those at Number 1212.

When he had read the letter a second time he looked at his watch.

It was nearly six.

"I'm going to see what there is in it," he murmured. "I don't see how the people in 1212 can know anything about the Moffat mystery. If I learn anything I'll be getting ahead of the boy, Dodger Dick, who thinks he will rake in the old gentleman's ducats by a little secret work. The young rat has been getting in too much work of late. I don't like him, and I reckon he is aware of the fact, too."

It did not take Nottaway long to change his official garments for others that would not be likely to betray him where he was going, and then he was off.

He took the quietest route to R—street, and a few minutes after six he mounted a flight of outside steps which ran up to the second floor of a frame building over whose door he had noticed the figures 1212.

A gentle rap at the door on the landing caused it to be opened by a little girl, who darted out of sight the moment she discovered the burly figure of the officer.

The next moment, however, another person appeared and bade Nottaway walk in.

This last person was a thin-faced woman of thirty-five, and when the officer crossed the threshold he noticed that her face showed traces of recent tears.

She shut the door carefully behind the policeman, and then turned to him in a half-timid manner.

"I am the person who received your letter, madam," said Nottaway.

"Nat Nottaway of the force?"

"Yes'm."

The little girl, who until that moment had been hiding behind her mother, casting sly glances at the officer, slipped into an adjoining room.

"I am glad you came, yet I can't say that we can help you much," continued the woman when Nottaway had taken the first chair at his disposal. "It may get us into trouble, but I want the truth told. Come here, Sylva."

At mention of the name the little girl came timidly from the room and ran to her mother.

Officer Nottaway then noticed that the child, who was about fifteen, though small for her age, had an expressive face with a pair of bright blue eyes and a perfect wealth of flaxen hair.

"This little child is sometimes compelled to be out at night," the mother went on. "During the days she does an errand here and there, and it is often late before she gets home. Her name is Sylva Semple; my husband is dead, and we live alone here. The child can tell her own story, Captain Nottaway, though I believe she would rather let me do it."

"I would prefer to hear it from the child," answered the officer, with a benign glance at the little girl. "Come here, my child, and tell me all you know."

Thus encouraged, little Sylva seemed to gain assurance, and the next moment she was standing beside Nat Nottaway with his arm about her, and his gaze riveted on her face.

"I was out later than usual last night," began the girl. "I was coming home after ten o'clock, and to reach mamma as soon as possible, I cut streets, as I sometimes do. All at once I found myself in a street which I seldom visit, for I don't like the people who live there. It was almost dark, only here and there a lamp, and they seemed to be a long distance apart. I had reached a corner when I heard the noise of wheels, and in a moment a cab came in sight and turned into the street. I could see that the vehicle was closed up, and that the man who was driving had a large hat pulled down over his forehead.

"When the cab entered the street it came straight toward me, and I backed up against the dark side of a house. In a moment the horses were stopped in the gutter only a few yards

from me, and two men got out of the cab. I could not see another soul besides myself on the walk. When the last man got out he leaned back into the cab and lifted out a woman with the assistance of his companion. I could see that she made no resistance, just as if she was unconscious, and that her head was covered with a shawl or something of the kind. The two men carried her into one of the houses, while the cab was driven away by the man in the slouch hat. I saw all this as plainly as it could be seen at the time, and when I got home I told mamma the whole story."

"Yes," added Mrs. Semple, "the child gave me the narrative just as she has given it to you, Captain Nottaway. We did not intend to say anything about it, for so many strange things happen at night in this city, but when I heard about the affair of G— street, I thought we might have a clew for the right parties."

Nat Nottaway bowed and looked at the girl.

A few questions elicited from her the name of the street where she had had her adventure, and she could almost with positiveness give the number of the house.

"There is something in this," thought the officer to himself. "I believe I have struck the right clew. The man was first seen on guard in front of the Moffat house a few minutes before ten; at half-past ten he was not there. Sylva says it was almost eleven when she saw the woman carried into the dark house from the mysterious cab. There is a connection here. I have stepped in ahead of the Dodger, and I will now proceed to show him that he is not the shrewd ferret he thinks himself. If Fanny Moffat was in the cab Sylva saw she is doubtless in the house at this hour."

Then Nottaway told the Semples that what Sylva had seen was no uncommon occurrence in New York, and while it was not likely to have any bearing on the Moffat mystery, it might bring to light another crime.

He thanked mother and daughter for the interest they had taken in the case, and bade them say nothing more about it to any one, a promise which was readily given.

Ten minutes later Nat Nottaway was some distance from the little up-stairs room and on quite another street.

Night had fairly settled down over the city, and the traffic of the day was dying out.

Officer Nat, like an eager dog on the scent, turned into a street exactly like the one Sylva Semple had described. It was a street where the lamps seemed very far apart.

He walked rapidly forward till he reached a certain point where his gait became slower.

Nottaway was where the girl had seen the cab.

He looked closely at the houses as he walked along, and as their fronts were often in shadow he could not make out some of their numbers.

"It must have been here," muttered the officer before a certain house with shutters closely drawn. "I'll mount the steps and make out the number."

He glided forward and put one foot on the first step.

There were three of them—wooden ones.

"Where is the number? I don't see any!"

Nottaway went another step higher, then in his eagerness he mounted to the last one.

As he leaned toward the door, set back a little from the last step, it opened in his face, and the next second he was caught in a clutch of iron and pulled into the house.

It was the work of a second, and then the door shut on the unfortunate man!

CHAPTER IV. TOILING FOR A CLEW.

A PERIOD of four days has passed since the scene we have just witnessed.

The Moffat affair has been almost swallowed up in a other mystery which affects and excites the Police Department of New York.

This is the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of Officer Nottaway.

He has not been seen by any member of the force since he walked out of the district station with the evident intent of investigating a letter which had been brought to the officer for him by a little girl whose identity was unknown.

There is a belief among the police that the hand of the gang that perpetrated the Moffat outrage is in the mystery of the missing officer; but this is mere conjecture.

Nat Nottaway has disappeared; that is known. Beyond that—nothing!

We return to the Boy Vidocq—Dodger Dick.

The man who called for him at Mother Sturgeon's, the night of the Moffat crime, did not keep his promise to return the following day.

If he had come he would have been spotted by the boy who was watching the house from a safe place, and the result would have been that in going away he would have had a tracker on his heels.

Dick was not idle during the four days which followed his taking hold of the case.

As we know, he wanted to discover the identity of the man who had played policeman in front of Manfred Moffat's residence.

He knew that much depended on his finding this person.

If he had known of little Sylva Semple's adventures, he might have been placed on a warm trail; but Dick had not yet made the acquaintance of the girl.

Several times he had called on Manfred Moffat who had begun to show the worry which was preying on his mind, and once or twice Dick thought he was about to divulge the secret he was keeping back.

"The man was here again, Dick," said Mother Sturgeon to the boy ferret's surprise when he returned the evening of the fourth day.

"What man?" asked the Dodger.

"The one who called for you the night of the Moffat affair."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he did not come up this time," was the rejoinder. "I think he must have changed his mind after he reached the house. I was looking out of the window, when I saw him cross the street, dressed like he was when he came before. I drew back and began to wait for him, but he did not come. When I looked again he was walking away from the house with another man somewhat smaller. It was barely two hours ago, or just before they lit the lamps."

Dodger Dick expressed a wish that he had been at home at the time.

"Which way did they go?" he asked, eagerly.

"Down the street."

"Toward Carusi's?"

"Yes, but why toward Carusi's?"

"Oh, that little fellow sees everything, and nobody that smokes ever passes him by. Excuse me, Mamma Sturgeon. I am off!"

The young detective darted from the room and soon appeared on the sidewalk below.

A few doors from the house was a little room on the ground-floor occupied by an Italian cigar merchant named Carusi.

The fame of his cigars was more extended than his own, and, as Dick had said, there were few smokers who passed the place without dropping in for a trade.

Nobody knew the sharp-eyed son of Italy better than Dodger Dick.

He had steered more than one smoker and customer into the store, and Carusi was grateful. Whenever Dick appeared he was treated with distinction by the cigarist, and Carusi was always willing to give out any information in his power.

On this occasion Dick had a strong motive for seeing the Italian at once, and a few moments after leaving Mother Sturgeon he entered the store.

Carusi's black eyes emitted gleams of satisfaction when he saw the boy ferret, and Dick went to work at once.

"You had two customers awhile ago, Leoni?"

"I've had many since sun-down."

"But two in particular. They came together—a rather tall, well-built man, and one smaller."

"I know! I sold them the best cigars I keep—" "La Senora." They would have nothing else, and I made them pay for their smoke, too!" and the Italian finished with a laugh.

"That was right. When a transient gold mine drops in, work it well, Leoni. Now, tell me what the men were like. You got a good look at them; you had them here in the light of your shop for some time. And I know, Leoni, that when you see any one you see him all over."

Thereupon Leoni Carusi gave Dick an accurate description of his two customers, even to the minutest details. He could not have described them better if they had stood for him an hour when, in fact, their trade had not taken five minutes.

The Dodger felt his gratitude to the Italian as he proceeded, and when he finished he could hardly contain himself.

"Would you know them now?" asked Carusi with a smile.

"Would I?" echoed Dick. "Yes, among a thousand! You say the largest man had one eye which was darker than the other?"

"I do."

"Isn't that uncommon, Leoni?"

"Yes, where both eyes are natural ones."

"Then, do you think one was false?"

"I cannot say."

"The eyes of the little man were all right, were they?"

"Yes."

"Had either one an Irish brogue?"

"Not for me."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, when they had reached the door one of them said in exact mockery of an Irish policeman, 'Move along now wid yez!' and both laughed as they walked off."

"Ha! which man spoke thus?"

"The larger one."

A look of satisfaction seemed to overspread the Dodger's face.

"I am on the trail at last!" he thought to himself. "The false policeman is no myth after all."

"Which way did they go, Leoni?" was the next question.

"Down town."

For a few moments Dodger Dick stood in the little cigar store weighing the discovery he had made.

It was something at last.

He had obtained a free description, he believed, of two of the men who had played the cool game at Manfred Moffat's house—the one who had played policeman on the sidewalk and one of those who operated on the inside.

He was sure he could not be mistaken.

Now, if he could but follow them up all would be well.

Moffat had told him that he was the victim of as desperate a gang of men as ever played a cool hand, and more than once he had cautioned him (Dick) to beware of their wiles.

"They are playing desperately for high stakes, my boy," he would say, "and if they suspect that you are on their trail, they will turn on you like a pack of tigers brought to bay."

The Dodger walked out of Carusi's considerably elated over the fortunes which had befallen him there.

He went to the next corner and stopped.

While he looked down the street he heard a voice at his right.

"Dick?"

He did not look till it had spoken again.

"Dick, I say?"

The boy turned in the direction of the sound and saw the figure of a policeman against one of the buildings.

In a moment he was with the man.

"No news from Nottaway yet, I presume?" asked the cop.

Dick shook his head.

"I'm afraid they've dragged the fellow into a trap," the patrolman went on. "Nat Nottaway was too well known by the rascals to be let run at large. That letter he got by the little girl did the business."

"Why don't they find the girl?" asked the boy with a smile.

"Why don't they indeed? Ah! that is it exactly. Haven't they scoured the city for her? She may have a thousand counterparts in New York. I tell you, boy, Nat Nottaway has done his last work."

"I hope not," answered Dick. "The captain did not like me any too well. I don't know why; but he was the last man to whom I could go for a favor. I don't censure him for that. If I could find Nottaway to-night I would do it even though it took me from the business I'm engaged in now."

At that moment a little girl flitted past the couple, but at mention of the missing policeman's name she seemed to stop a few feet away.

Neither Dick nor the patrolman seemed to notice her.

"Find him if you can, Dick," the policeman said, as the boy detective backed off, and with a cheery "I will," he turned and walked away.

He did not see the girl whose eyes were watching him with a good deal of curiosity, and when he passed her, she followed him swiftly and apparently on tiptoe.

All at once the young detective was touched on the arm by timid fingers, and then he stopped and looked into the girl's face.

"Pardon me, sir; but do you know Officer Nottaway?" she asked.

"Indeed I do! You mean the man who is missing?"

"Yes, sir. I don't like for people to think that I listen where I ought not to; but I thought I heard you say awhile ago that you would like to find the policeman."

"I said so," replied Dick.

"What is your name?"

"Richard Sly, sometimes Dodger Dick, the Wharf Detective," smiled the boy.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl. "I am Sylva Semple. I think mother and I can trust you. We have kept the secret too long already. Will you walk home with me, Mr. Dick?"

Dick said "Yes" with all eagerness.

CHAPTER V.

THE CLEW ON THE WALL.

To walk home with the bright little girl thus strangely encountered on the street, was to hear a recitation of Sylva Semple's adventures in the dark thoroughfare, as well as to gain an account of Officer Nottaway's visit.

The revelation was a surprise to Dick, and while he listened, he thought he could guess what had become of the missing policeman.

"We have kept the story back through fear," the mother said. "The disappearance of the officer told us that he was dealing with bold, bad people, who would not hesitate to turn on us if they thought we knew anything against them. Then, the police might suspect that we were in the plot to silence Officer Nottaway, and between the two fears we dared not open our mouths. I am glad now that Sylva found you when she did. I am sure you will not betray us in any way, and that you will try to discover the fate of the unfortunate man."

"I think I know what discretion means in a case of this kind," smiled the boy, as he gave the promise. "At last I begin to see light on the affair which has puzzled me these four days. If the trail comes to a good end, your daughter shall receive a handsome reward. It is a double trail just now, though before long it may lose that distinctness. How old is Sylva?"

Dodger Dick asked the question almost unconsciously.

Perhaps the pretty face and expressive black eyes of the girl had something to do with it, but if he had been asked at that moment, he would not have confessed.

"Sylva is going on fifteen," answered Mrs. Semple.

"Almost there, mamma!" corrected Sylva herself, straightening with a proud smile.

"She doesn't look it, I'm sure," said Dick, and when he had left the house he was in doubt whether he had said the proper thing or not.

"So Nat Nottaway was set upon a trail by the Semples, was he?" continued the boy. "If he carried with him the message that called him to Number 1212 the mother and daughter may feel the power of the gang. I hope for the couple's sake that Nat did not have it on his person when he disappeared. Now let us see whether the same trap will catch Dick Sly."

The Dodger proceeded by the shortest cut he knew to the street where Sylva had seen the cab and its occupants.

He knew that there Nat Nottaway, the policeman, had disappeared from view, and he doubted not that he had fallen into the clutches of the men who had used the vehicle.

The girl's description of the physique of the man who had occupied the box that night tallied somewhat with what Dick had seen of the form of the bogus policeman, as well as with Leoni Carusi's account of one of his late customers.

Was he forging the chain of identity about the man who watched in front of Manfred Moffat's house while the villainous work was done inside?

Dick triumphantly thought he was.

At any rate he plunged bravely into the dark street which might yield much or nothing at all.

It was not wholly unknown to him. He had been there before, and with the secrets of one or two houses he was tolerably well acquainted.

Sylva Semple had directed him as well as she could to the particular house in which she thought was to be found, if found at all, the key to the two mysteries just then agitating the great city.

Dick approached the suspicious territory with his usual caution.

The houses within it were much alike, long-built, old-fashioned brick ones standing boldly up to the sidewalk, with clumsy shutters and a fifty-years-behind-the-times look.

The Boy Vidocq did not mount the steps of any one of these to make sure of the number as Nat Nottaway had done.

He seemed to guess which was the right house, or as he walked along he gave one a closer scrutiny than the others.

"That is the place," thought Dick to himself. "If I am not mistaken, it looks like a trap. But how did they get Officer Nat into it? He is

no chump, and a well-laid plan stands but little chance of catching him."

After awhile the Dodger disappeared from the street, but in a short time he came to the surface again in the rear of the suspected house where everything was as dark as it was in front.

With the nimbleness of a cat he scaled the fence that met him, and dropped down into the silent yard.

"Nobody at home!" laughed the young street sleuth.

The next moment his figure as dark as the prevailing shadows themselves made its appearance close to the building, and for some time he carried on his operations without a pause.

Dick became convinced that the house was really untenanted.

"Maybe they thought that somebody else besides Nat Nottaway knew something of their whereabouts, and cleared out," muttered the boy. "This house is as empty as a shell without the oyster, and I'm going to see beyond this door."

It was a common door, with a very common latch, and as Dick pushed it open he was confronted by the most intense gloom he had ever encountered.

This did not deter him for he crept inside and found a second door unlocked like the first as if it was a standing invitation in his way.

"Just as I thought; the place is empty. I am to find out whether or not it has been inhabited by the game I'm after. The inspection may not yield me anything at all, but we will see."

Dick had not entered the unknown place to back out before his inspection was completed. He very fully realized the risk he was running, but when he thought of the work before him he bravely went on.

He passed from room to room on the lower floors in the dark, finding the doors as readily as the hound finds a trail.

Here and there were pieces of stationary furniture, and several of the rooms were carpeted.

Dick went up-stairs at last. There it was safe to strike a light, so, producing his box of pocket tapers, he now lit his way, shading the light with his hands, but no clew was revealed. There were but two rooms on the second floor, to the right and left of the cramped landing.

The Dodger took the right hand one first.

He examined the apartment. It contained nothing that rewarded him.

"One more chance and then I'm done," said Dick to himself, and he entered the last room.

The blaze of a fresh taper lit up the gloom with a sudden brilliancy, and the next moment the boy ferret uttered a low cry, and was staring intently at the wall before him.

"What is this?—writing on the wall?" he exclaimed, as with keen excitement he leaned forward and held his little torch so as to reveal more clearly the message he had discovered, for message it was, written on the white wall of the room, and though it was uneven and coarse, as if it had been penciled in the dark, he easily read:

"Must I perish? I am Fanny Moffat, abducted by three men on the night of the 10th of July. I am a prisoner. I am in despair. It is three days, now, while I write. Must I perish here?"

FANNY MOFFAT.

The reader may imagine the feelings of the boy detective as he drank in every word of the writing on the wall.

It was the most terrible revelation he had yet encountered.

He wondered how it had escaped the eyes of the gang, but he did not lose any time in conjectures.

His match went out, but not till he had read the writing the second time and photographed it on his mind, as it were.

The room contained no other clew that he could see. In it the trail seemed to come to an end, and to leave the boy in the dark once more.

Fanny Moffat had been there, but where was she now? She had traced the startling words on the wall, confirming Dick's belief as to the number of the men concerned in the deep game; but that was all.

In all probability she had been taken away without warning, and before she could add anything to the wall revelation.

"Well, the old house yielded something," murmured the young sleuth when about to leave the premises. "But the mystery that shrouds the fate of Nat Nottaway is still unbroken. Now, what next? This balt must not be the final one. No! I have a clew at last. I know something about the men who made the swoop. Leoni Carusi set me on the trail, and Sylva Semple has added a ray of light. The chase begins from this hour!"

Dick passed through the rear yard again and glided off.

Three minutes later his figure reappeared on the ominous street, and as it did so one man caught another's sleeve and whispered:

"Look! the young imp of the wharf! He is on the scent!"

"I see him!" came through clinched teeth as a pair of eyes took fire. "He will soon wish he had never seen a trail!"

CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER STURGEON'S PLUCK.

"KEEP him in sight. On no account lose the boy for a moment. Do you see him yet, Wayne?"

"Of course. You don't think I'm going to let a prize like that slip through my fingers, do you?"

"I hope not."

Thus spoke the two men who glided after Dick like a pair of shadows.

When he turned out of the dark street into one where there was more light, the men became more cautious, but did not let their vigilance slack.

"Let him have string," whispered one. "If he takes us to Mother Sturgeon's, well and good. We shall then know where to find him. He may not be going thither, though, and we may discover that he knows more about our game than we think he does."

Down one street and up another went the Dodger, shadowed by the tireless trackers who did not intend to be thrown off the scent by anything.

Much to their surprise the young detective went home.

They saw him enter the house and were near enough to hear him climb the stair that led to the foster-mother's apartments.

For more than an hour they watched the building expecting Dick to emerge, but his figure was not seen.

"Why not try a bold play?" suddenly exclaimed one. "I know how their quarters are arranged. Mother Sturgeon can be silenced in a moment, and a swift exit will secure the success of the scheme."

"Come, then. I am as eager to muzzle the young sleuth as you are."

The two men entered the open hallway.

It was dark there.

They halted beyond the step and adjusted false whiskers to their faces; then they went upstairs one after the other toward Dodger Dick's abode.

It was a hazardous venture for the two villains if the keen young Vidocq of the city should be wide awake and ready to receive them, but they took their chances with the coolness of men trained to just such work.

An hour had passed since Dick had been tracked to the house.

As he had not been seen since, the men argued that he had gone to bed to catch some sleep for the work of another day and night.

When they paused at the door that opened into the room occupied by Mother Sturgeon, they applied an ear at the lintel and listened.

Not a sound came from the room beyond.

A moment later several slight raps were given, and then a shuffling of feet was heard.

"It is the old lady herself, Wayne," whispered the smaller of the night-hawks. "Make sure work of it. Don't give her any chance to raise the alarm."

The turn of a key in the lock was then heard, and in a second the door opened, disclosing the inquisitive features of Dodger Dick's best friend as she held the portal slightly ajar.

Before Mother Sturgeon could distinguish either of her visitors, a hand darted toward, and as it closed on her throat the assailant crowded into the room, and the terrified woman saw the intense eyes that boded her no good.

The captor was followed by his companion, and the woman found herself face to face with the villains who had undoubtedly come on an errand of mischief.

"The door!" said the man who held Mother Sturgeon. "I have the old bird safe enough; make sure of the chick."

Before he had finished, his comrade was at the door which led into the Dodger's little bedroom, and the woman saw that one of his hands clutched a revolver.

Something like a triumphant smile passed over her face, despite her own situation.

The following moment she was forced into the chair she had just left, and the hand at her throat was loosened.

"Is the boy in there?" asked the man, glancing at the armed guard at the door.

"Go in and see," was the reply.

"Call him out."

Mother Sturgeon laughed a little, as she answered:

"I cannot."

"You mean you will not," responded the man.

"The nest is empty. You have come too late!"

The pleasure it seemingly gave the speaker to utter these words was not concealed. It made the men look darkly into her face.

Too late! Was it true that they had played their hand too late to catch the bird for whom they had set the trap?"

"Open the door!" commanded the man who had Mother Sturgeon in charge.

The order was obeyed almost before it was spoken, and the light that entered Dick's room revealing the interior confirmed the woman's words.

"Choke the truth out of the old witch. She knows it!" growled the person who came forward, and then Mother Sturgeon was confronted by both men.

"The boy came in awhile ago?"

"He did."

"He did not go out by the front way."

"Ah! didn't you see him?"

"He did not go by that way, I say. You know he did not."

Silence was Mother Sturgeon's only reply.

"You cannot afford to meet our inquiries with an untruth," continued the spokesman.

"I shall tell you none."

"Where is the boy?"

"I do not know."

"Beware! You are dealing with men of nerve and purpose!" was the menace that followed. "You know whither Dick went when he left the house."

"I am no traitress!"

Words more firmly spoken than these never came over the lips of age.

They were accompanied by a look of calm defiance, and the two sharps must have seen that they were dealing with a person their equal in courage and coolness.

"It will go hard with you if you do not answer us," warned one of the pair. "Once more, I say that we are not going to be baffled by an old woman. Come now!—the truth, Mother Sturgeon!"

A look was all they got for their words.

"Push her to the wall!" cried the man who had done but little of the talking since entering the house. "She will open her mouth when she sees we mean what we say."

A moment afterward the foremost villain drew from his pocket a wide rubber band, and before Mother Sturgeon could guess his purpose it was slipped over her head, and down over her arms.

In a second her arms were pinioned to her sides, and so terrible was the pressure that she could hardly suppress an exclamation of pain.

Having secured her in this manner she was next lashed to the chair, and then her head was thrown back, and her mouth forced open.

"Once more before we go to extremes!" said the main operator. "Shall we have the truth about the rat who holes with you?"

"I have nothing to tell!"

"For the last time, beware! People have died under this treatment."

"Go on. There comes a day of retribution for these things. I am no traitress, I say."

Mother Sturgeon was almost instantly gagged, and without a show of gentleness in the operation.

When the men stepped back they saw the old woman sitting bolt upright in the chair with her silver gray hair falling over her shoulders, and drops of blood trickling over her chin, the work of the merciless gag.

It was a picture calculated to move a heart of stone; but the hearts of the disguised villains seemed harder than that.

They saw the eyes of Mother Sturgeon fastened upon them. Her piercing orbs seemed to look beyond the masks they wore, an' to see them as they really were.

"The next time you'll impart information when you're asked!" heartlessly laughed one of the pair. "We will find the rat in spite of your stubbornness, and that before he shows up here. You're rather old to serve in this manner, Mother Sturgeon, and we would like to have dealt easier with you. But you would not. The toils you are in you wove yourself, so don't blame us. Once more, however, and for the last time. Where did Dick the Dodger go? Will you answer?"

The eyes of the old woman seemed to get a

more defiant gleam, and her reply was a slight shake of the head—the only one she could give under the circumstances.

"Good-by! We had to silence you to find the chap we want. When he comes back—if he ever does—tell him we were here—if you can!"

There was another heartless laugh, the door opened and shut and Mother Sturgeon was left alone.

Unable to move and without power to make a single sound, her situation was terrible, and her agony intense.

The clock that ticked on the shelf back of her chair was the only thing of sound in the room.

Its seconds were minutes of pain to the unfortunate woman, and its minutes seemed hours that were never to end.

By and by a deathly pallor overspread Mother Sturgeon's face. The cruel gag was doing its work in a manner calculated to end before long the misery it was inflicting.

Oh! for strength to move her arms—to break the rubber band that seemed to bind her body!

Where was Dick? Would the two scoundrels find him? Why did he not come?

It seemed impossible for Mother Sturgeon to be held by the thrall of villainy when she wanted to warn her *protege*. She must free herself from the toils.

It was nearly midnight when a footstep came up the stairs from the street below.

It had not the heavy tread of a man's boot, but resembled the nimble footstep of a boy.

It came on till it halted at Mother Sturgeon's door.

"There's a light inside," a voice said, and then the door was opened.

In another instant a strange wild cry was heard, and a boy with blanched face was staring at the sight before him—an overturned chair, and lashed to it a seemingly dead woman with gray hair.

CHAPTER VII.

JUST IN TIME.

THE boy was not Dodger Dick, but Larry Long, the young detective's most intimate friend, and the youth who was his companion the night of the outrage and crime at Manfred Moffat's.

Instead of bolting from the room and sounding the alarm, the boy had presence of mind enough to go forward.

He quickly cut the cords that kept Mother Sturgeon in the chair, and then he raised the woman from the floor,

"What villains did this work?" he exclaimed. "I did not know that Mother Sturgeon had an enemy in the world, but this looks like it. When Dick knows of this there will be an oath to get even with the rascals."

A dash of water in Mother Sturgeon's face told Larry that life had not fled, and when the old lady had recovered sufficiently to speak, the boy listened to a story that made his blood boil.

It was evident that he had come in the nick of time, for such was Mother Sturgeon's enforced position on the floor, that in a short time death would have ended the scene.

Dick left just before the rascals came. He made an important discovery somewhere—some writing on a wall. If he had remained with me a little longer the two men would have met with a warm reception. I am sure the larger of the two was the fellow who called here for Dick a few nights ago. I recognized his voice though he thought I would not. No; I am not afraid to stay here alone. The cowards think I am done for, but they will learn that Mother Sturgeon is worth a dozen dead women!"

"Then you do not know where Dick went?" asked Larry eagerly.

"He was going from here to Manfred Moffat's to consult with that gentleman about something. A long time has passed since, and he may not be there now. Of course the masked men could not get from me any information about Dick's visit."

Larry was forced to content himself with this meager direction, and when he left Mother Sturgeon he fell into a deep study.

"I came too late to find the Dodger, but in time to serve the person who is dear to him," murmured the boy. "Mother Sturgeon had a tough experience with the gang, and the next time she will be on the alert. Her adventure tells me one thing—the villains have turned on Dick, who is endangering the success of their game. They will not stop at anything, for men who will treat an old woman as they treated Mother Sturgeon, will not hesitate to commit

the blackest of crimes. Dick must be on the lookout. I think he has on his hands the most dangerous case he has ever undertaken."

The Dodger's friend did not know where to look for him.

Of course the interview with Manfred Moffat had ended long before, and there was no telling where Dick was.

Larry could not imagine where the boy Vidocq had found any important writing on a wall, nor how it affected the trail he was on.

He could only conjecture, and this course was not satisfactory; therefore, he was obliged to give it up, which he did with reluctance, as he walked away from Mother Sturgeon's abode.

The empty house on the dark street was a place unknown to Larry, for he had never encountered little Sylva Semple, and knew nothing of her somewhat thrilling adventures.

The girl was pleased with the frank manner of Detective Dick; but when he had left her plain abode, her face suddenly became pale, and she upbraided herself for having divulged the secret.

"That house is a trap of some kind!" she cried to her mother. "It caught the policeman who is missing, and it will catch the boy, too. I wish I had never seen Dick, the dock ferret. I have given him information that may get him into a net from which there is no escape."

Mrs. Semple tried to calm her daughter's fears, but with not very good success, and then she resolved that Sylva should not be out on the street any more at night.

If the gang knew what she had seen, would they not silence her in a manner that would rob a mother of her only child? It was a terrible thought for the widow in the plain house.

But what has become of Dodger Dick?

Let us see.

Mother Sturgeon told the truth when she informed Larry that her shrewd young *protege* had gone to Manfred Moffat's.

The interview there did not last long, for Dick soon reappeared on the street.

"Well, it wasn't an empty visit, anyhow!" declared the boy ferret. "Mr. Moffat is coming round slowly, and I will have him where I want him after awhile. Now, I will go to the person who wants to know more than I may tell him."

Twenty minutes later the Dodger rung the door-bell of a house in a quiet quarter.

The door was opened by a woman, who stepped back when she beheld Dick's face.

"Is he in?" asked the boy.

"Yes, and waiting for you, I guess."

Dick returned a smile, and ran up the stairs to the third floor, where he enter a room without ceremony.

He was greeted joyfully by a good-looking young man of twenty, who occupied a chair at a table in the middle of the apartment.

In front of the youth lay a number of ledgers, and any person could have seen at a glance that he was a young accountant who was doing some work at home.

"I am just through," he went on, shutting the book, whose pages he had just blotted. "Now you have all my time, and I hope you have good news for me."

"Not very good, I'm afraid," answered Dick, at which the young man's countenance fell.

"What! have you found nothing yet—noting at all about Fanny?"

"I have a slight clew."

"That is something! It is much better than nothing at all. Tell me, Dick."

For the next few minutes Dodger Dick "had the floor," and to a very attentive audience of one, he detailed his visit to the Semple's, and his adventure in the empty house on the ominous street.

"What do you think?" eagerly questioned the youth at the end of the narrative.

"It is a slight clew."

"But not too slight for you, eh?"

Dick's face brightened.

"I hope not," said he.

"And so do I?" was the quick exclamation.

Dodger Dick, you are working for me as well as for justice and Manfred Moffat. My life is wrapped up in the young girl, who has been carried off for a purpose by the men who play the coolest game ever played in New York. It is not a case of blackmail, as the police think, I am told. Those men will not come to Moffat for a compromise, though he is abundantly able to pay thousands for Fanny's return. The game is deeper than that."

"Yes, there is a secret back of it all," answered the boy ferret. "Manfred Moffat is keeping something from me. Once or twice he has approached it of his own accord, but all at

once he changed the subject and left me still in the dark."

"You are right. Manfred Moffat has a secret. If he divulged it, it would throw some light on your trail, but I am afraid he is going to let you hunt in the dark."

"He has even told me as much. I can expect but little help from him beyond his description of the men who visited him that night."

"Have you run the bogus policeman down yet?"

"I am hot after him," smiled Dick.

"Take care that he doesn't turn on you."

"Oh, he will do that if he can!" exclaimed the wharf spy. "I expect to have trouble before I net the birds."

"That you will. But can't you guess Manfred Moffat's secret?"

Dick slowly shook his head.

"It is about Fanny?" he ventured, looking the young bookkeeper in the face.

"It is," was the reply.

"Have you been able to get near it?"

"Not very near, Dick. The men who made the swoop know what the secret is, and they are going to make the most of it. If Manfred Moffat would not tell you who are in his employ, much less would he divulge anything to Roland Rollins, a mere bookkeeper who works o' nights to add to his little store."

"That is true," said Dick. "Time will unlock the treasury which contains the secret. I am willing to work in the dark, as it were, for my victory will be the greater when it comes."

For a few moments there was no reply to these words.

The young bookkeeper sat silent in Dick's presence.

"Dick!" he suddenly cried, leaning across the table in his eagerness, while his eyes caught the excitement he felt. "Dick, I want you to find Fanny Moffat soon—to clear up the mystery, and to bring the rascals to justice. I can't offer a big reward, but all I have saved is yours for success."

"I don't want a penny of your money!" replied Dick the Dodger. "I wouldn't touch it for the world. I am going to the end of this trail because I like the people who want me to get there. They can't hide Fanny from me much longer. I tell you, I have marked two of the scoundrels pretty well. I know the big man who stood guard and played cop, and one of the couple that worked inside. I've got at them step by step. Within the next few hours I will know more, and then, unless they play a hand for which I am not prepared, Mr. Rollins, I'll close up the business!"

"Good for you!" exclaimed the bookkeeper. "The time may yet come when I can enter Manfred Moffat's house and proclaim the truth."

"What! have you a secret, too?" cried Dick.

"Not much of one," was the smiling rejoinder. "There is a matter of love between Fanny Moffat and I, that is all."

"Oh!" and then Dodger Dick broke out into a prolonged whistle of surprise. "Well, we'll see that it comes out all right, Mr. Rollins. It is Dodger Dick against three sleek rascals of the town."

"If you fail, I fail," rejoined the young accountant.

"I see," and then, as the Boy Vidocq left the room, a voice said in ardent tones:

"My fortunes and my life go with that young sleuth!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW A BIRD WAS CAUGHT.

THE next day at the noon hour a bright-eyed but plainly dressed girl of about fifteen stopped as she was crossing one of the city squares to watch the gambols of two little dogs that were having a merry time on the grass.

On every side of her people were moving to and from dinner, and few of them saw either the girl or the dogs.

It was evident that the little spectator had some time on her hands, for she became interested to such an extent that she took one of the vacant benches and continued to enjoy the scene.

By and by she was approached by a well-dressed man of past thirty.

He had been eying her for some time though she was unconscious of the espionage, and she did not see him till she heard his voice.

"Those are pretty dogs, my child," said the man, taking a seat on the bench beside the girl.

She drew back with a movement of sudden aversion if not suspicion, but he did not appear to notice it.

A moment after he whistled to the dogs, and

they raced toward him, each trying to outdo the other.

"Would you like to have these little fellows?" the man asked, turning to the girl.

"That I would; but we could not keep them very well if they were mine."

"Why not?"

"The people where we live don't like dogs."

"Ah! Where is your home?"

The girl hesitated.

All at once she seemed to think that she had gone far enough with this man, a total stranger.

The eagerness with which his last question was put—an eagerness which he had attempted to conceal, but without avail—had alarmed the girl.

She left the Park settee and drew off.

"They don't like dogs—your neighbors don't, you say?" followed up the man.

"No."

"They have nothing to do with what you choose to own. It must be a queer neighborhood that does not like little fellows like these," and he looked down at the dogs wrestling at his feet, and then at the girl.

"Where did you say this funny neighborhood was?"

"It is where I live!" was the reply that nettled the man no little. "I must be going now. I have been here too long already."

A shadow of disappointment settled over the man's face as he watched the girl move off.

"She's a smart one if she hasn't been coached," he said under his breath. "I am sure I have found the right person. Ah! there goes Wayne after her anyhow. He saw the signal, and will do his part."

By this time the girl had vanished on the opposite side of the square, and the man left the bench and strolled away.

He had seen that the girl had somebody on her track.

This somebody was a large man, who did not lose sight of her for a moment, and he conducted his espionage in such a manner as to give the victim no grounds for suspicion.

One hour later the man who had questioned the little girl in the Park, and the one who had followed her, met near the spot where they had separated.

"What luck, Wayne?" was asked the tracker.

"I got there at last," was the answer. "The trail was crooked, and tried my patience several times; but I am able to report success."

"Well?"

"The bird lives in G— street."

"Where they don't like dogs!" laughed the other. "She lives there, you say?"

"Yes."

"With her parents?"

"With her mother."

"Father dead, eh?"

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Sylva Semple."

"Do you think she is the right person?"

"I am almost certain of it."

"You watched her home?"

"To the very door."

"What was she doing down here?"

"She is an errand girl. She runs errands for whoever will employ her. I got my information from a person who gave it without suspecting why I wanted it in all its details. She is sometimes out pretty late at night."

"Therefore she may have been out a few nights ago?"

"She must have been."

"Somebody was; that is certain!" laughed the questioner, but his face soon grew sober. "But she did not head you straight home, you intimated just now?"

"She stopped several times like children will when they are not in a hurry. There is where she tried my patience."

"Having tracked her home, you did not wait for her to come out?"

"No. I know the house—Number 1212, R—street, up an outside stair to the left."

"That is definite enough surely," was the reply. "The bird does not seem hard to catch."

"I could have her to-day."

"So could I, Wayne. She refused to tell me where she lived, as if she suspected I was not altogether square. I came back to the question as adroitly as I could, but it was no go. Sylva Semple, as you call her, is a wary bird, but that must not balk us."

"Of course not."

The two men continued to talk in this strain for some time longer, and then they walked away together, and were soon lost among the human sea of Broadway.

The afternoon drew to a close and the long shadows of the city's buildings cast the streets in shadow.

At five o'clock a little girl came down an outside stairway between two houses, and vanished up the street.

She was seen by a man on the watch across the street, and in a moment he crossed and was at her heels.

The girl was Sylva Semple, and the fellow who was dogging her footsteps had been at his post for three solid hours.

It was the big, brusque man who had followed her home from the Park.

He had come back to his work and success had rewarded his patience.

As if she feared pursuit, the girl looked once or twice over her shoulder, but evidently did not see the man by whom she was watched.

"On another errand, eh?" chuckled the trail dog. "Maybe you won't want to run any more for some time. I don't think you will if you know what we think you do."

Sylva Semple did not lead the man a very long chase.

Four squares distant from her home, and on another street, she received a small package at a door and started off again.

"I follow to the end, my bird of the dusk," the man said to himself. "The further you go the later you will be getting home, and the surer will be my catch."

The girl carried the package to another house a few squares further on, and delivered it at a door to a person whose face the man was not near enough to see.

"I see it all," he murmured. "The girl has a reputation for honesty, and people who are willing to help her let her turn an honest penny by delivering messages, and so forth, for them. But this does not prevent her from seeing sights she should not see, nor from giving detectives and such people information that can be turned against others."

Sylva had evidently finished her work for the day, for while the man eyed her, she came tripping back on her way home.

"She must not get home. If we are to catch this dangerous bird, it must be done now. There is too much at stake to let Sylva Semple run at large with a child's tongue in her head. The only wonder is that it has not wagged more than it has."

The man drew back into the mouth of an alley.

He had to work swiftly if he had to mature a plan for Sylva's capture, but he had one already planned.

Entirely unsuspecting of the danger that menaced her, the little girl came up eager to get home with the last fee of the day.

All at once a hand darted out from the darkness of the alley and closed on her arm.

She started to run, as a cry welled from her throat, but found she could not take a single step.

In a second she was jerked from the sidewalk, and then a hand fell upon her mouth, and she looked up into the triumphant eyes of the man who had caught her.

"You're old enough to know what a still tongue means in a case of this kind," fell upon her ear. "You will go with me quietly, or never go home any more. No harm is to come to you, and you may be free in a short time."

"Let me go now!" cried Sylva, as the hand was lifted as if to let her answer.

"Not just yet," laughed the man.

"I don't know anything!"

"About what?"

The girl did not answer.

She seemed to feel that she had already said too much, for her eyes got a resolute expression and her lips met firmly under her captor's gaze.

Almost before Sylva was aware of what was taking place, she was out of the alley and in a cab with the man.

The vehicle was moving rapidly across the city, and Sylva Semple looked at the lamps like a person in a maze. She could not see her companion, for the interior of the coach was dark; but she knew he was near, for she could feel his hand at her wrist.

She could not tell how many squares she was carried over, nor how many streets she traversed. Her mind was in too much of a whirl to fix it on anything.

At last the carriage stopped, and she was helped out. The grasp at her wrist did not relax.

In a moment she was carried across the sidewalk to an odd-looking house, and then into a well-lighted room, where she found two men.

"Here is the bird that sees so much!" exclaimed her captor, and Sylva saw the two men lean forward and eye her intently.

CHAPTER IX. ON THE RACK.

For a moment the girl stood bewildered, as it were, before the men into whose hands she had fallen.

The situation was new to her, not only new, but startling as well.

"So this is the person we have been waiting to catch, is it?" suddenly laughed one of the three, as he leaned back in his chair and threw an inquiring glance toward the man who had brought Sylva in. "Well, she does not look very formidable, though I see she has a pair of keen bright eyes."

Then he looked at the girl.

"You were out the other night, my child?" he went on.

"I am out every night, more or less," was the reply.

"Was last Thursday night one of your nights out?"

Sylva thought a moment, and all at once a thrill ran over her frame.

In an instant she seemed to divine the cause of her arrest.

The men saw her start.

"Yes," she answered, calmly. "I was kept on errands rather late that night."

"You were on a certain street where there are few lights?"

"It lay on my way home."

"Never mind that. You were there?"

Sylva nodded.

"Did you see anything strange?"

"Yes, I saw the cab and the people who were in it."

"We thought so," smiled the examiner. "Having seen this, you sent a certain policeman word?"

There was no reply, and the three men looked at one another.

"Do you intend to answer?" continued Sylva's questioner, with rising severity in his tone.

"I do not wish to betray anybody."

The firmness with which these words were spoken surprised the men.

"It might be well for you to answer when you are questioned," said one.

"I have answered you. You must not expect me to betray any person, for I cannot do it. I will not!"

Sylva's figure seemed to increase in stature as she spoke.

"It is another Mother Sturgeon case!" laughed one of the three, and one of the others joined in with a light chuckle.

"Aren't you going to send me home?" asked Sylva.

"So you can post another policeman?"

"How do you know I told one?"

"That is very clear, child." And to Sylva's surprise the speaker took from his pocket the very message she had carried from her mother to the police station for Nat Nottaway, the missing officer.

The girl lost color at sight of the paper; she could not help it.

It seemed to her that she was looking at a brave man's death-warrant.

"This came from your house, eh?" And the paper was held up before the girl's eyes.

Sylva's lips did not part.

"The girl who cannot talk cannot go home."

In a moment the little prisoner took a step toward the table and the next minute she had snatched the paper from the hand that held it.

Then she sprung back before she could be caught, and the message was torn into pieces before the very eyes of the three scamps.

"There's a show of temper for you!" laughed one. "You didn't catch a dove abroad, Wayne—not by any means."

As a document the message was utterly worthless when Sylva finished with it.

"I see! we must cage you!" exclaimed the man who had done the questioning.

Sylva's eyes flashed.

"Do just as you please," said she. "I see that I have fallen into the hands of people who have no mercy."

"When you are out o' nights, you must not keep your eyes open for sights not intended for them," was the answer.

That was the end of the inquisition.

Ten minutes later a little girl stood at the iron-barred window of a room barely eight by ten.

Beyond the bars there was strong, thick glass, and far beyond this still the countless lights of the great roaring city of her birth.

Sylva Semple had paid dearly for what she had seen on the ominous street, and she wished during her moments of despair that she had never heard of Policeman Nottaway and his foes.

She wondered what her mother would think about her absence.

She should have been home ere this, but here she was cooped up she knew not where, and with some terrible fate impending over her.

It is no wonder that her heart sunk within her when she tried the solid door of her prison and looked through the bars upon the city whose subdued noises reached her ears.

"Am I lost from home?" the girl asked herself. "Would those men release me if I told them all I know about the message and the officer? No! I will not buy my liberty in that manner. I would have to tell them about Dodger Dick who is going to find Policeman Nottaway if he can. I will not do it!"

As for the men into whose clutches the girl had fallen, they held a consultation in the room where we left them after Sylva's imprisonment in the small apartment.

"Now let's corral the boy, and then we will have all the cards in our hands," said the big man who went by the name of Wayne.

"That is not so easy," laughed one of the others. "Ere this he has peeped in on Mother Sturgeon and found things there topsy-turvy. It will make him warm after us—"

"Just hot enough to toss him into our hands."

"I'm not so sure of that."

Sylva Semple was left to her own meditations in a house of whose location she had not the slightest knowledge. She could think on her troubles or go to sleep, just as she liked; but she could not set herself free.

The three men went off down the street together.

By-and-by one, the giant of the trio, was seen alone in a quarter of the city where he was just the person to attract the attention of the boy who observed him.

"I have my bogus policeman now," exclaimed the man's observer. "That is the big man who bought cigars at Carusi's, and also the fellow who stood guard in front of 332 G—street while his companions played the cool hand on Manfred Moffat."

The speaker was Dodger Dick, and if he had encountered the man a little sooner he would have seen him in company with his two companions.

Wayne was not aware that he was watched.

The Dodger kept at a safe distance, but not so far off that he could not use his eyes.

All at once the big man disappeared.

The Boy Vidocq hastened forward, and the next minute he came face to face with Wayne.

It was almost a collision, and it seemed impossible to avoid a mutual recognition.

Wayne had merely stepped into a cigar store to gratify his appetite for a good smoke, and he was puffing vigorously when he came out and almost ran against the boy.

The Dodger dodged quickly to one side, but not quick enough to escape the vigilant look of the giant.

"Here!" exclaimed the man throwing out one hand and clutching Dick before he could slip away.

"By Jupiter! You're just the young Tartar I want!"

The heavy hand closed like metallic clamps upon the boy's shoulder, and he was dragged forward by the very man into whose hands he did not want to fall.

"You don't want me, I guess!" laughed the Dodger. "Oh, no! I'm not the shrimp you're fishing for. The one you want just wriggled round you corner and—"

"I know what I want!" was the interruption. "If I didn't, I wouldn't be holding you here. You're one of the foxes I close on wherever I find 'em. Are you coming along like a boy of sense?"

Dick, still holding back, looked up into the man's face.

He saw that his identity was well known by his captor, and that his shrewdest language would not loosen the clutch; therefore he would have to play another game to get free.

"Where's your badge to-night?" asked Dick boldly.

The man started.

"I think you look best in uniform," continued the boy raising his voice. "You would soon be the handsomest Celt on the force if you would only parade in the plumage I saw you in a few nights ago."

"Silence!" hissed the man, and then he attempted to move the boy toward the mouth of

an alley a few feet away, but Dick planted himself so firmly that the task threatened to prove no easy one.

"Look here! you don't want to play with me," he exclaimed. "I know a bogus cop when I see one, and the moment I saw the man who stood guard in front of 332, I knew I had treed a coon of that sort."

A scowl as dark as night almost settled over the man's brows, and Dick felt the grip of the big hand relax.

The next moment he jerked back with all his strength, and lo! he went staggering across the gutter, and was barely able to keep his feet.

The suddenness of the break on the boy's part frustrated the big man, but in a second he sprung after his catch.

"Not to-night!" cried Dodger Dick, bounding away in time to elude the eager hand. "When you get ahead of Dodger Dick, Mr. Bogus Cop, you'll know more than you do now!"

A curse of disappointment was the answer which Dick heard as he lengthened the distance between him and the man, and when he looked again, his late captor was not in sight.

"The trap is always set for me; I see that plainly," laughed the young detective to himself. "It is my first active experience with one of the gang, and I've come out first best."

He did not know that experience number two was then not far off.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW SPOTTER.

MANFRED MOFFAT the occupant of 332 G—street grew more restless day by day.

He could not be made to believe that Dodger Dick was working up the case with his accustomed shrewdness.

The boy was doing his level best, and, as we have seen, was making considerable headway. He had pitted against him as cool and desperate a set of men as ever played for high stakes in New York or any other city, and a reasonable person would not have expected him to make rapid headway against them.

The outrage and abduction told heavily on Manfred Moffat.

He grew impatient, then morose, then fearful, and Dick on his last visit saw that the man feared another visit from the band of three.

It was the day after the encounter with Wayne the bogus policeman that this visit was made.

The man of G—street was found in his library with pallid face and lips that trembled while he spoke.

"I have employed another detective," he said to Dick. "I thought it best to put another person on the scent, and I trust you won't object."

"When did you hire the man?"

"This forenoon."

"Did you send for him to Inspector Byrnes?"

"No; he came here and offered his services."

A smile appeared at the boy ferret's lips.

"What is his name?" he asked.

"Gaspard Hood."

Dick said nothing.

"I presume you do not know him as he has not been in the city long," suddenly continued Mr. Moffat. "He is a keen-looking man and just the person whom I would pick out for a successful detective. No success no pay. He made the bargain himself, and insisted on it against my inclinations."

"Well," said Dick, "I trust the new sleuth will strike the trail at once; but because he has been employed, I am not to quit the work?"

"Certainly not," spoke Moffat quickly. "Mr. Hood spoke complimentarily of you, and advised me to keep you at work."

"He knows me, then?"

"He knows of you, at least."

"Have you his city address?"

"He did not leave it, from motives of his own keeping, I suppose."

"Just so, Mr. Moffat."

Dodger Dick left the house with his head full of the new sleuth.

"I did not like to ask for a description of the new detective for that would have been carrying my inquisitiveness a little too far," he said to himself. "Gaspard Hood is a sleuth I don't know, and I'll wager my head that he is unknown to Captain Byrnes and his lieutenants. Went to Manfred Moffatt and solicited the job, did he? Has not been in the city long, and no success no pay. We'll see about that, Mr. Hood."

Not far from the house on G—street the Dodger was joined by Larry who for some time had been watching a man who in turn, seemed to be regarding Moffat's residence with a pair of keen eyes.

Larry pointed him out to Dick without, as he thought, attracting the man's attention, and the Dodger studied him attentively for a few minutes.

"That is not the fellow I had my tussle with last night," murmured the Dodger. "He is lurking about here for something. You can see by the way he carries his cane, and by the way he conducts himself that he is somewhat of a swell."

Then a thought flashed through Dick's mind.

"Can that man be Gaspard Hood the new detective?"

The two boys walked off, and at length dodged into a narrow alley and disappeared.

In a little while the suspicioned man came along and looked anxiously down the narrow passage.

Of course he saw nothing of Dick and Larry.

He looked a little disappointed at first, but all at once he laughed to himself, and turning on his heel, walked off.

By and by a well-built boy came out of a store and looked after the man.

"You lost your game in the alley, now be careful that it does not watch you home!" exclaimed the youth who was Dick in Larry's coat and hat. "You are not going back to Manfred Moffat's, I see. Well, go where you will. I have a little time on my hands."

It was no trouble for Dodger Dick to keep this man in sight.

He went almost direct to one of the well-shaded squares, where he took a seat and lit a cigar.

"I wonder if that's one of Carusi's best?" smiled the young sleuth, as he watched these proceedings from a secluded point of observation. "It strikes me that my man is waiting for some one. Ah! there he is!"

At that moment there came in sight a large man whose proportions were almost gigantic.

Dick could hardly suppress an exclamation when he saw him.

It was Wayne, the fellow who had caught him under the gaslights!

The two men appeared familiars, for when they had exchanged nods, the big one joined the other on the bench, and both immediately fell to talking.

Dick was not near enough to hear a single word, but then he could watch the pair, which he did.

The smaller one answered the description given by Leoni Carusi, the cigar dealer, of the two customers whom he had had a short time before, and Dick believed he had found the rascals who had almost taken Mother Sturgeon's life because of her refusal to betray him to them.

"If I could only hear half a dozen words," thought Dick. "They would be sufficient for my purpose, for I am sure they would throw some light upon a very dark subject."

Then he left his station and began to make a wide circuit, with the intention of getting behind the two men.

He had to be exceedingly careful, for if they were members of the gang of schemers they would be on the alert, and he did not want to be seen at that time.

Stealing cautiously to the rear, Dick began to approach the bench by degrees.

The Park was well filled with people, for the day was hot and good shade was desirable.

The two men still occupied the settee, and were keeping up their flow of talk.

Dodger Dick crept nearer and nearer.

He knew that a swift glance might betray his presence, and that the birds, watched with so much caution, might suddenly take flight.

At last the Boy Vidocq found himself behind a group of young trees, which, with a bench, protected him from scrutiny.

He could get no nearer without incurring great risks; in truth, there was no more concealment between the men and himself.

Dodger Dick leaned forward with breathless interest.

Would the suspects talk loud enough for him? Six words, he thought, would be enough.

Not more than twenty feet separated him from the objects of his attention.

If the people passing on every side would keep quiet for a moment, he might strike a clew which would give him the game.

"We've got the *entree* at all hours, and that's a big step," the boy heard from the lips of the big man. "I know you must have played it well, for you never overdo anything of the kind."

Dick was not permitted to hear another word, for a quick step sounded behind him, and as his

arm was clutched, he turned to look into a woman's face.

It was a white, anxious face, and the young sleuth did not recognize it as his stare told.

"Thank fortune I have found you!" exclaimed the woman. "My child has fallen into the hands of the villains. Ah! I feared she had seen too much for our good."

"Your child?" stammered Dick, and then he seemed to realize the situation—it came to him like a flash.

"You are Mrs. Semple, the mother of Sylva!" he cried. "What has become of your daughter?"

"She was taken from me last night. She went out on an errand and never came back. Don't I know that *they* followed her, and that they will put her out of the way because she saw the cab and the men on the dark street that fatal night? Why didn't we keep the secret? I wish now we had not opened our mouths about the matter to any one."

A strange thrill ran through Dick's frame as he thought of the woman's revelation.

Was it true that Sylva Semple had been dogged and captured by the gang?

Had she gone to join Fanny Moffat in the realms of mystery and of fate?

Dick glanced toward the bench upon which he had stolen with so much caution, when lo! it was empty.

This discovery startled him as much as the woman's revelation had done.

The men had skipped away quietly and were completely out of sight.

"Come! can't you help me find Sylva?" cried the widow, calling Dick back to the subject ever uppermost in her mind by tugging at his arm. "I haven't slept a wink since I lost her. I have reported to the police; but ever since I have been ransacking the city for you. You are looking for Fanny Moffat and for Nat Nottaway, the missing officer; but you will devote some time to my cause. I know you will."

It was an appeal hard to resist.

"The three trails run together; don't you see?" continued the woman. "Sylva saw the men with Fanny Moffat in their power, then we sent Officer Nottaway after them; now, for what she saw, my child is in the claws of the gang. It cannot be otherwise. I want you to find her, Dodger Dick. We have not the money Manfred Moffat has—"

"Never mind the money!" interrupted the boy detective. "I see somebody just now—somebody I'm interested in. Don't call Sylva lost while I'm on deck. I'll see you later. Good-by." And Dodger Dick jerked away and hurried off, leaving the woman to follow him with a look of astonishment.

CHAPTER XI.

IS IT A TRAP?

THE boss boy detective of New York was out of sight in a jiffy, and Mrs. Semple, who had unexpectedly found him in the Park, was left to go back to the desolate home.

The sight which had taken Dick off in such a hurry was nothing less than the figure of one of the men he had just been watching on the settee.

He did not want the fellow to get out of his sight again, and he resolved, not to lose him by inadvertence, as he had lately done.

The Dodger was not long in reaching the particular spot where he was certain he had seen the person supposed to be Manfred Moffat's bogus detective: but though he looked everywhere, no person of his description was to be sighted.

Dick was puzzled.

Had the man seen him and vanished?

"That's what I get for listening to a woman!" exclaimed the boy. "But I've picked up some more news, anyhow. Sylva Semple is missing. She has fallen into the same kind of a trap that caught Nat Nottaway, and the workers of the trap would like to catch me."

The young shadow was not disposed to give up his search for the man he had seen.

He knew that Mrs. Semple had gone away, and therefore he did not go back to look for her, but ransacked the square pretty thoroughly for the other party he was after.

But all in vain.

Dodger Dick went home soon after this adventure.

When he entered Mother Sturgeon's presence, the old lady took a piece of dingy-looking paper from her bosom, and handed it to him as she said:

"This came by a boy, Dick. He brought it in a little while ago, and didn't want to leave it at all. But when I told him who I was, and

promised that you would get it just as if he delivered it himself, he reluctantly left it in my care."

"Meanwhile the boy spotter was unfolding the paper, and all at once Mother Sturgeon heard him utter a strange cry.

"What is it now?" asked the woman.

"This confirms the story I listened to in the Park awhile ago. By Jupiter! it is better than I dared hope for. The girl—Sylva Semple—has found means to communicate with me."

Mrs. Sturgeon's look was a question which Dodger Dick did not deign to answer, for just then he was reading the letter he had received:

"MASTER DICK:—I have fallen into the hands of some men I do not like. My prison is on the second floor of Number 889, N—street, West side. I am sure you can find me by night by the back way. I have made friends with a boy who will deliver this, but who cannot help me in any other way. I want to go home again. Can you help me? I know you will if you can.

SYLVA SEMPLE."

Dodger Dick read this strange missive over again before he looked up.

"What was the boy like who brought this letter?" he asked, looking at Mother Sturgeon whose face revealed the curiosity she had.

"He was small for his age, was not at all well-dressed; but he had two very black eyes which I did not like."

"A street Arab, eh?"

"He looked like one."

"Did he seem to fear that I would drop in while he tarried?"

"Something made him uneasy. Maybe it was that. He got out of the house as soon as he gave me the letter, and I hadn't time to ask him whether he was to wait for an answer."

"I don't think he was," smiled Dick, glancing at the letter he held in his hand, and then his face assumed a serious expression while he read it again.

"It is very important?" quietly asked Mother Sturgeon after watching the boy some time.

"You should hear. I want your advice sometimes, and this may be one of those times."

Then Dick read aloud the letter, and at the conclusion looked up at Mother Sturgeon who had leaned forward in order not to miss a word.

"What do you think?" said Dick.

"It's very queer."

"What is?"

"That Sylva Semple, if she is such an important prisoner, should be allowed to make friends with somebody on the outside."

"Ha! that is just it!" exclaimed the boy. "This idea popped into my head the second time I went over the letter. Mamma Sturgeon, I guess this bait won't catch the fox."

The old lady's eyes dilated.

"Do you think it is a trap, Dick?" she exclaimed.

"I think it is nothing else," was the reply.

"Didn't that letter come from Sylva Semple? Let me see the handwriting."

The boy detective passed the message across the table and watched the old lady while she adjusted her glasses and leaned forward to read it.

"It looks like a girl's hand," said she. "I used to make those kind of letters, but it was long ago, Dick."

"I haven't said Sylva didn't write the letter," replied the boy. "I am not prepared to say so yet; but I am inclined to think that that letter left Number 889, N—street, with the knowledge of the very rascals who want to catch me. I may not be able to prove it to your satisfaction, Mother Sturgeon, but I believe it all the same."

"Then I would not go near the house."

To this the young sleuth made no satisfactory reply, and when the letter had been handed back to him he folded it carefully and hid it in his bosom.

"Number 889," said he. "It is a queer place for a prison, but it may be there. Sylva Semple has disappeared as completely as Nat Nottaway has done. Her mother has informed the police, and ere this every patrolman in the city has a description of the girl. You see that she tells me in this letter that I can reach her by the back way, throwing out the impression that her prison is in the rear of the house. It may be."

"The boy who carried the message did not say."

"Of course not," and the Dodger smiled. "He looked like a west-side gamin, did he? Well, I may see this gutter Mercury who carries messages from birds in their cages."

"Don't run into danger. You know those men," and one of the tapering fingers of Mother Sturgeon fell warningly upon the Boy Vidocq's arm. "They are the wretches who thought

they had silenced me because I would not betray you, and they will not hesitate to finish you by any means in their power."

"Never fear for me," laughed Dick. "I am now pretty well acquainted with the wiles of the band of three. I think I can pick out Manfred Moffat's new detective, Gaspard Hood, and I may do it ere long, much to that gentleman's sorrow. In the first place, Sylva Semple knows the street Arabs of New York too well to trust any of them with an important mission. As you say, she is not apt to be allowed the privilege of communicating with any one on the outside. The handwriting is that of a girl brought up as Sylva has been; but my head on a wager that the whole thing is a trap. But I will know before long."

Another night was falling over the city, and here and there the street lamps were resuming their accustomed duties.

The vicinity of the house whose number was given in the startling message received by Dodger Dick was quiet and inviting.

The house itself, a rather large two-story brick, stood slightly apart from its neighbors.

There was nothing suspicious about it beyond the fact that the shutters were closely drawn both above and below, and at first look one would have thought that its people were "out of town."

Not long after dark this house was quietly inspected by two boys.

These were Dick and Larry.

Dressed in garments not usually worn by them, garments which strikingly altered their general appearance, the young spies inspected the house with a great deal of interest.

Watching them, though they knew it not, from a safe distance, was a boy whose shoeless feet gave out no sound as he plied his calling.

"It is a trap, Larry," whispered the Dodger. "And no doubt the fellows who set it are sitting back waiting for the game. I would like to see beyond the door, though."

"Are you going to run the risk?"

"I—don't know."

Just then the boy who had been eying the young friends turned on his heel and disappeared.

In less than two minutes he reappeared in the cramped yard back of the house, and a peculiar knock on the door admitted him.

He was seized by a hand in the darkness and conducted to a room where a gas-jet was burning just enough to let him see the figures of two men besides the one who had let him in.

"They're out there. I saw 'em," reported the boy.

"They?" echoed two of the men at once.

"They," I guess I said, and I stand by it, too."

The three men exchanged glances of perplexity.

"They're takin' in the house from eave to gutter," the boy went on. "One o' 'em must be the boy I carried the letter to, though I don't know just which is he."

"If both come so much the better," exclaimed a large man who did most of the talking. "You will stay where you are, boy."

The next moment the speaker quitted the room, leaving the gamin spy with his companions.

Nobody saw him steal through a dark hall to the rear of the house. His movements were noiseless and catlike.

When he stooped he stood within reach of a door and a window, midway between the two, and then he said to himself, in tones just audible:

"Now let the Norways enter the trap, and cease to give us trouble!"

CHAPTER XII.

A HOLE IN A CEILING.

TEN minutes passed; nobody came. Not a sound broke the stillness that enveloped the man in the dark.

He waited five minutes longer, and then growling out an oath, went back to the persons he had left in the dimly-lighted room.

"The rats have smelled the game!" he exclaimed. "We shall not catch them to-night," and then there was an exchange of disappointment and chagrin.

It was true. Dodger Dick had guessed the nature of the decoy which had been sent him by the gang, through the medium of the street Arab, and instead of walking into the trap, where the rascals waited for him with so much eagerness, he had walked away with a laugh of triumph.

"They must do better than that if they want to catch us," he said, addressing Larry, his com-

panion. "It was a neat decoy, but it would not work just as its inventors intended. I would like to know what genius got up that letter, which, if Sylva Semple signed it, she did to save her life. We will know some time, Larry!"

"What next?" asked Larry.

"I want to see Gaspard Hood at work."

"You mean Manfred Moffat's new detective?"

"Yes."

"What! don't you intend to keep your promise to Mrs. Semple?"

"Certainly I do," replied Dick, giving Larry a look of astonishment. "I don't forget for a moment the toils the girl is in, neither do I let Nat Nottaway and Fanny Moffat out of my mind for long at a time. We have to go a little slow on this trail, for we are dealing with the finest lot of villains that ever went unhung. From what I heard in the Park to-day, I believe that Mr. Moffat is going to receive another important visit before long."

"From the three?"

"From one of them at least."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I am going to become a guest at 332 G—street if there be no serious objections by the occupant," answered Dick with a smile. "I am going there now; the sooner the better perhaps. I think I can persuade Manfred Moffat that it will be to his advantage to take a boarder of my size for a short time. He will wonder why, of course, but I will not have to explain."

Thirty minutes later Dodger Dick ran up the steps of the Moffat residence on G—street, and jerked the bell.

When the door was opened by a young colored man he walked into the library where he found the head of the house pale and nervous in the chair he seemed to occupy all the time.

Manfred Moffat started visibly on seeing the boy detective before him at that hour.

"Do you want a guest for a little while, Mr. Moffat?" asked Dick laughing.

"I?—a guest?" was the answer. "Who wants to visit me?"

"I am the person."

"You, boy?"

"Yes."

"That is very strange."

"Not so strange as you think. What sort of room have you above this one?"

"I sleep there."

The boy detective was nonplused for a moment.

"I thought it might be an apartment which I could occupy for a season."

"How long?"

"Three days at the furthest, I think."

"It is at your disposal," said Moffat with an alacrity that astonished the young sleuth, and then the man's lips seemed to twitch as if from fear. "Do you think I am to see more of those cool rascals in this house?" he hurriedly asked.

"We don't know what may take place," responded Dick. "Where will you sleep if you give your private chamber up to me?"

"I will go to a room in the left wing of the house. I occupy it sometimes."

Dodger Dick glanced up at the ceiling.

"The room above is directly over this is it not?" he asked.

"It is, though it is not of the same dimensions."

"There is no communication between the two rooms, I presume?"

"You are mistaken. A caprice of the man who built this house put a little door in the ceiling. It was accidentally discovered by a frescoer whom I had at work here several years ago. It is yonder where the corners of the dark border meet. You cannot see it from here. Open or shut, it is all the same. I intended to have it closed when it was discovered, but never did, and it exists to-day as it did when found by the workman. You shall have my room for as long as you want to use it. You are in my employ hunting for Fanny, and I am ready to render any assistance in my power."

"Thanks," bowed the boy detective. "What kind of a report does your new man, Mr. Gaspard Hood, make?"

"He made one this afternoon."

"Ah! was it encouraging?"

"Decidedly so," replied Moffat, with a smile that illuminated his ashen face for a moment.

"I am glad of that. It is a good thing that somebody is making progress on this perplexing trail."

Manfred Moffat did not notice the slight tinge of sarcasm in the boy's tones.

In a few moments the Dodger was the only occupant of the library.

Now and then he heard noises overhead which told him that the gentleman of the house was preparing the room for his reception.

"He doesn't want my eyes to see some things maybe," thought Dick. "There may be some papers he would not like to have me touch. I did not come here to pry into anybody's treasury; I am here to use my eyes and ears to advantage, but not to the detriment of the honest."

"Your room is ready for you," announced Manfred Moffat, appearing rather suddenly at the door of the library.

Dick left the chair he occupied.

"When do you retire?" he asked.

"My usual hour is nine. It is a little past that time now."

"And what about the servant who let me in a while ago?"

"Henry? Oh, he has gone to bed."

"Near the apartment I am to occupy?"

"No, sir."

Dodger Dick bade Manfred Moffat good-night and climbed the stair to the room assigned to him.

"He didn't object, nor did he ask the questions I thought he would," said the boy to himself, when he had inspected the chamber. "I am in luck as regards the spy-hole in the floor. I may not have to use it at all; nobody knows. And I may need it the worst kind before very long. So Gaspard Hood reports progress, does he? Well, that shows what a keen sleuth he is. Evidently Manfred Moffat thinks a good deal of the new sleuth he has put on the trail."

It did not take the city shadow long to find the little trap in the floor.

It was discovered by lifting the carpet in one corner of the room, and the point of his knife enabled him to raise the closely-fitted piece of wood.

By an arrangement of this kind he was enabled to look into the room beneath which was the library.

Already it was empty, but Manfred Moffat on retiring had left the gas burning brilliantly enough to show the boy sleuth the different objects of the room.

Dodger Dick had never been in just the fix he was in now.

The house was quiet, and he could imagine that its other inmates had retired and were trying to catch some sleep.

As for himself he had no intention of doing so. Several hours passed.

The noises in the street grew still, and when midnight arrived, the quiet was almost sepulchral.

The boy spy of the city was wide awake.

All at once there came up from below a sound which slight as it was carried him at once to the trap in the floor.

Had Manfred Moffat returned to the library?

When Dick had adjusted his eye to the little opening, he saw a man in the room below.

The gas had been turned on a little higher in order to better reveal the appointments of the place, and as the boy ferret looked, the man seated himself quietly in Moffat's chair at the table.

"The private detective has come!" mentally ejaculated Dick, after he had eyed the person a few moments. "That man is Gaspard Hood, the new sleuth to whom Moffat has given *entree* at all hours. I heard the two men in the Park congratulating themselves over an arrangement of this kind. The bogus detective isn't here to report—not at this hour of the night. The game goes on. Now what is to be the next move?"

The man in the library appeared to be waiting for some one.

Dick watched him unceasingly. All at once he darted from the chair and went to the door. His footsteps sent forth no noise as if he wore stockings over his shoes.

He disappeared and remained away a few seconds, and when he came back into the library he was followed by another man a glimpse at whom nearly brought a cry from the young spy at the trap-door in the ceiling.

The second person was Wayne the big man, the bogus policeman and the Ajax of the gang of three.

"This is a pretty play!" smiled Dodger Dick. "I think I am getting my money's worth and more, too."

The two men advanced to the center of the room where they held a consultation in whispers, the purpose of which did not reach the Boy Vidocq.

When the council ended the giant stationed himself at the door leading into the hall while the other man began a systematic search of the library.

It was a scene that possessed a thrilling interest for the young sleuth at the trap.

He did not let a single movement of the pair escape him.

He saw Gaspard Hood search every nook of the apartment. Drawers were opened with skeleton keys, and their contents swiftly but thoroughly examined.

The small iron safe that stood underneath a desk at one side of the apartment did not escape but it yielded nothing.

At last the men stood together once more.

"We must go further," said the false sleuth.

"If you are ready we will take another step."

"I am always ready," seemed to come through the teeth of the big man.

"I know what that means," cried Dick.

"They are going to invade this room!"

CHAPTER XIII.

UNEXPECTED TREASURE.

It was not Dodger Dick's wish to be caught in a trap of his own setting and especially so soon after his escape from one which would have been his destruction had he tested it.

He was certain that the two men were about to invade the upper room in search of something which they had failed to unearth in the library.

The boy had but little time in which to make up his mind.

It was evident that the rascals believed Manfred Moffat to be asleep, and, that being the case, they would attempt to enter his usual sleeping apartment by stealth.

Dick stepped from the hole in the floor to the door.

In a moment he slipped an inside bolt, and then turned out the gas which had been burning dimly up to that time.

In a short time muffled footsteps approached the door.

The Dodger awaited results with a smile at his lips.

Presently there was a noise in the lock.

The skeleton key!

The boy detective ran his hand along up the door and felt the safety bolt still in its place.

For some time the key was manipulated by the hand on the outside, but while the lock was forced back the bolt remained the barrier that kept the rascals from their prey.

At last the noise ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and after some silence the footsteps receded.

"The play wouldn't win!" laughed Dick. "A pretty detective is the man Manfred Moffat lets into his house at all hours! I wonder what he would say if he could see Gaspard Hood playing burglar at his private room? Aha! Mr. Moffat, you are nicely caught by your own estimate of man."

The young Vidocq did not draw the bolt till thirty minutes had passed since the visit of the two scamps.

Observation told him that they had not gone back to the library, and he was led to suppose that they had quietly left the house.

When he opened the door with great caution, he saw no one. A faint light shone on the steps leading to the floor below, and a strange stillness filled the whole building.

Dick went out to reconnoiter.

Having drawn his shoes, he slipped down the steps without sound, and stood in the short hall that led to the library.

The door stood ajar, left so, doubtless, by the two men on their retirement.

A minute after, the boy spy was beyond the threshold, and on the scene of the thorough search for he knew not what.

"Manfred Moffat ought to know just what kind of man he has trusted," said Dick. "Probably he would not believe that Gaspard Hood is a fraud, and one of the gang of three. If he had seen what I have seen, he would be convinced. I—"

The boy's sentence was broken by the unmistakable sound of footsteps in the hall.

He stepped back involuntarily, and threw himself behind a curtain stretched across one corner of the room.

Scarcely had he done so when he heard a voice, and then he saw two men under the library light.

The big man was one, and Gaspard Hood the other.

"We must come again," said the giant.

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, if to-morrow will reward us. Two need not come. You, in your capacity of private detective, can play that hand."

Gaspard Hood smiled.

"I think I am solid with the old fellow," he

answered, with a chuckle. "He thinks I am making brilliant headway in the case. I gave the boy a good send-off, so as not to raise suspicion in his mind. He doesn't think the boy the best ferret in the world."

"That is my opinion exactly," was the answering laugh, and then the big man glanced about the room.

"Shall we go through this place again?" he asked.

Dodger Dick's heart seemed to rise in his throat at this suggestion.

He was not prepared to cope with the two cool men whom he could see from his place of concealment.

If they should draw the curtain aside and discover him, his hunt might end where it began—in Manfred Moffat's house.

"There's nothing here," replied the false ferret to the suggestion that the library be inspected again. "The documents we want are up-stairs, in the room we did not get to enter. We must let it go for this time. To-morrow I will come back. I am admitted here at all hours, as you must know from what you have seen. Come! to-morrow may give us prize number two. Then for the big play."

The boy spy behind the curtain breathed free once more, when he saw the two men turn their backs to him and steal from the room on tip-toe.

He had had a very narrow escape, for the villains might have discovered him while he was returning to the library from the room overhead.

Indeed, he had been very fortunate.

This time he heard the door that let the men out, and by springing to the window he caught their footsteps on the pavement.

At last they were gone.

Dodger Dick was glad to get rid of them.

He had picked up several good links for the chain he was industriously forging for the Gang of Three; and he thought to himself that Gaspard Hood might meet with a very cool or a very warm reception on the occasion of his call the next day.

"I guess my discovery will keep till to-morrow," said Dick to himself. "I don't like to disturb Manfred Moffat, just to tell him a story that will trouble him. He will know soon enough, and then—"

Dick checked himself suddenly, for the library door had opened, and Mr. Moffat himself stood before him!

There was something startlingly striking in the staring eyes and woe-begone features of the resident of Number 332, and when he advanced across the floor Dick mechanically recoiled.

Manfred Moffat passed close by the Boy Vidocq without bestowing on him the slightest notice.

"He is walking in his sleep!" ejaculated Dick. "Manfred Moffat is a somnambulist!"

While the Dodger watched the man, he felt a strange chill sweep to his heart.

He had never been in just such a predicament before.

Manfred Moffat moved straight toward the ample bookcase, which almost filled one side of the room.

Dick watched him intently.

He saw him open one of the glass doors and take down a large book.

The following moment the man thrust his hand into the opening made by the removal of the book, and when it was withdrawn it clutched a paper carefully folded and having the appearance of a legal document.

A man wide awake and in full possession of his senses, could not have acted with more rationality than did the sleep-walker.

With the paper in his hand Manfred Moffat came back to the table which he had just left, and dropped into a chair alongside. Then he lit a gas-burner on the table and opened the document.

"Surely he is awake now," thought Dick, but the next moment he knew better.

The paper all at once dropped from Moffat's fingers and fell at his feet.

No effort was made to pick it up as if all recollection of it had passed from the somnambulist's mind in an instant, and when Dick saw him leave the chair and walk toward the door with no effort to reclaim the document, his wonder increased.

Slowly and with noiseless tread, for he was in his stocking feet, Manfred Moffat glided from the room, leaving Dodger Dick in a state of mind impossible to be described.

"In fortune's name, what else am I to see in this house?" he exclaimed. "It is a place of mysteries and singular sights."

Then his eyes fell upon the paper lying at the foot of the chair by the table.

He stepped across the room and picked it up.

Impelled by a curiosity he could not check, the young shadow opened the document and leaned toward the light.

The first word struck him strangely, and then he read a whole line while he held his breath.

"LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF ALFRED OSWALD."

"Who is Alfred Oswald, and why does Manfred Moffat keep this paper?" cried the boy spy. "Can this be the document the two men were looking for?"

He knew but little about wills, and the formal language of the one he held in his hand had no charms for him. But still he held it—he hardly knew why—and the longer he looked at it the stronger grew his belief that he had found the object of the secret search of the house.

"Maybe I had better put it back," he said, at last, and actually started toward the bookcase. But in the middle of the room he stopped.

"Hold!" he cried. "Alfred Oswald? That is the name of the man of whose disappearance the papers were full fifteen years ago. I've heard Nat Nottaway talk about it more than once. Some of the detectives of New York are looking for him yet. I have found the will of the missing man. Is Manfred Moffat Alfred Oswald, or does he know something about him? I won't put this paper back. I believe it is my duty to keep it," and the boy ferret thrust the paper into his bosom and buttoned his coat over it.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DODGER CAUGHT.

WHEN Dodger Dick left the Moffat residence early the next day without encountering Mr. Moffat, he was convinced that he had scored a victory.

His first visit was to the humble quarters occupied by Roland Rollins, the young bookkeeper and Fanny Moffat's lover.

While the youth was sorry to hear that the girl herself had not been found, he opened his eyes with pleasure when the Dodger produced the will.

The two went over it carefully, Roland reading every word aloud, and Dick following his finger as it moved from point to point.

"I think I begin to see through Manfred Moffat's secret," said the bookkeeper, looking up into the young sleuth's face when the signatures had been reached.

"So do I," was the response.

"Well?"

"Manfred Moffat is not Fanny's father."

"That is it exactly."

"She is the daughter of Alfred Oswald, the maker of this will."

"Correct!" responded the bookkeeper as his eyes twinkled. "The Gang of Three know this, but they want this important paper to play their hand through. Manfred Moffat, while appearing to be honest, and he may be, after all, has been keeping this will in the dark, while the world believes that he is Fanny's true parent. This must be the secret he has in keeping, and which he has refused to disclose to any one. He knows the motives of the robbers, and sooner than tell the truth, he is willing to let you work in the dark. He hopes that Fanny will come back, and the gang be brought to justice without an exposure. Now, more than ever, Dick, the girl must be found and the rascals thwarted."

"What do you think Manfred Moffat intended to do with the will last night?" asked the boy.

"Most likely burn it," was the quick reply. "Seeing it in danger, he evidently meant to destroy, and thus prevent a catastrophe of some kind in the future. It was your luck that he did not seek to recover it when he dropped it on the floor. With this paper out of the way, the child of Alfred Oswald mentioned in it would never receive a dollar of her own. Somehow or other, the Gang of Three know the true state of affairs, and having got possession of the girl, they must obtain this paper to complete their success."

"Then they will strike, eh?"

"Yes. Manfred Moffat will not dare to oppose them, for they will have the secret itself which they can hold over his head. It is a bold game, but the very men for it are at the helm. They have netted Officer Nottaway and the girl Sylvia Semple, and now have the snare spread for you, Dodger Dick."

The young bookkeeper seemed to reason like one who knew the ground like a book.

The Boy Vidocq listened to every word and

approved the accountant's observations with a nod.

"You keep that document till it is needed, Roland," said he. "The rascals won't look here for it, neither will Manfred Moffat think it has fallen into our hands. If I recollect, Alfred Oswald's disappearance was very sudden and mysterious—"

"Yes. He was supposed to have been a passenger on a vessel which was lost at sea; but this is mere conjecture. Manfred Moffat knows what became of him, else why would he have the missing man's property?"

"Right you are, Roland!" cried the Dodger. "Now I am going to look after the two gentlemen I encountered last night, also after the three missing people—Fanny especially."

"Be careful. Don't forget the traps of the gang."

Dick responded with a laugh that he would not, and was gone.

"Gaspard Hood will not call early on Manfred Moffat," thought the boy. "I will make a move that may be productive of good results, and then I'll drop in on my employer and wait for his bogus detective. If I can only succeed to-day as I would like, Gaspard may be surprised when he calls at 332 G— street."

But there was a decided surprise in store for the young shadow—one which he did not look for, and one for which he was not very well prepared.

He went first of all to Larry Long's quarters, which, by the way, were not far from the house into which the gang had tried to decoy him with the deceptive letter signed with Sylva Semple's name.

Larry was not at home, and the woman who had charge of the house told Dick that his friend would not be in for some time.

"I'll have to do it myself," murmured the Dodger, as he moved off, and a few moments later he was near the house of the trap.

All at once he ran across Larry, who caught his arm and whispered a piece of information which sent a thrill through his frame.

"For once all the scamps are away and Sylva is in the house," were Larry's words.

"Can this be?" ejaculated Dick.

"Nothing was ever truer!" cried Larry. "With my own eyes I have seen the three leave the house one by one within the last hour, and I caught a glimpse of a girl's face at one of the back windows."

The Dodger's heart gave a great leap for joy.

"If this is the case, we want to get into the cage," he exclaimed. "Your eyes never deceived you, Larry, and I am willing to stand by them through thick and thin."

"Shall I prove my words by leading the raid?"

"No. I want that honor. You will go and watch Manfred Moffat's house. I want to know whether Gaspard Hood, the false detective, makes the call he promised last night to make, for I don't want to run in upon any scene unexpectedly when I go back to the place."

A few minutes after Dodger Dick stood alone near the house with a daring plan pretty well matured in his mind.

"The three out in town, and Sylva in the trap," he thought. "There is likely to be more than one bird in the cage. I don't want to win half a game. I want the success to be complete. Nat Nottaway is missing, and I want to include him in my victory over the coolest set of villains I ever dealt with. Officer Nat never liked me, but I am always ready to help a brave man no difference who he is."

The boy detective proceeded to the rear of the house which he studied from a safe point of observation.

There was nothing very suspicious about the premises. The back shutters were closed with the exception of one that was broken off.

It was probably at this window where Larry had seen the girl supposed to be Sylva Semple. He could not have seen her very well at either of the other windows.

Dick kept his post as long as he dared without risking the return of the Gang of Three. He had discovered nothing by his inspection.

If Larry had seen the little girl of R—street, she was not visible to him.

After awhile Dodger Dick began to approach the house through the back yard.

The back buildings were somewhat rambling in style, and ere long he found himself sheltered by them, and within a few feet of a door.

Dick did not expect to find any portal unlock-ed for his accommodation.

He thought he would have to use a little force, and in this he was not disappointed.

The door was found to be locked when he

tried it, but he took a peculiar looking wire from his pocket and went to work on the lock.

Five minutes of adroit work proved enough and when the boy removed his wire the door was at his service.

Beyond the door stretched a dim hall, and beyond it—what?

Dodger Dick did not know.

Nothing daunted the boy ferret of the metropolis.

He had come too far to recede, and a retreat at that stage of the game was furthest from his thoughts.

In a short time Dick was in the hallway of the strange house, and the door was shut behind him.

Not a sound came to his ears.

If the place was empty it could not have been stiller.

In the semi-gloom of the corridor the boy ferret leaned against the wall and drew off his shoes.

Then he went forward.

"The room of the window with one shutter is to the left," he said to himself. "I must find the stairs, and the rest will be easy."

The boy went on down the hall till, all at once, to his utmost horror, the floor opened at his feet!

A sharp cry burst from Dick's throat when he found himself falling.

It flashed across his brain that even though the gang was absent, the trap had been set for him.

Suddenly his fingers struck the edge of the opening, and for them to touch anything was to cling to it with the nerve of a person in despair.

It was a most fragile clutch, and one which the boy spy could not better, for his whole weight depended on his fingers, and his muscles seemed to have been torn in two by the sudden check.

Dodger Dick did not know over what kind of an abyss he was dangling.

A glance below showed him a pit of darkness which the eye of the night-hawk could not have fathomed.

To the horrified boy it appeared without a bottom.

Never before had such a trap caught him.

The trap door had fallen without any noise, and his sudden cry was all that had proclaimed the success of the catch.

Had Larry betrayed him? Was he in the employ of the Gang of Three?

Impossible! Dick rejected the thought the instant it entered his head.

No. Larry Long was not capable of treachery!

For several minutes the boy sleuth hung above the pit of gloom in awful suspense.

His fingers were becoming numb under the dangerous grip; they would fail him soon, then—

He dared not think of the result.

"I am in the greatest peril of my life!" cried the boy. "Shall I drop and trust to luck?"

And there came up from the depths of the pit a startling reply:

"Drop!"

CHAPTER XV.

WHO WAS IN THE PIT?

THE Boy Vidocq could hardly believe that a human voice had come up from below.

He inclined his head over his shoulder and listened.

The sound was not repeated till he spoke.

"How deep is this pit?" asked Dodger Dick.

"Not more than fifteen feet, all told," was the reply. "If you drop you will not touch me, for I will be out of your way."

While the voice was unnatural it had a tinge of familiarity that attracted the young sleuth.

"Two of us down here will prove too much for the Gang of Three," resumed the voice in the pit.

Dick at once loosened his grip and dropped.

It was a short fall through pitchy darkness, and when he struck he was seized by a pair of hands he could not see, and a burst of joyful laughter rung in his ears.

"We meet under strange circumstances, Dodger Dick," said the man in the toils. "What do they say about me by this time? Have the boys given me up?"

Then it was that the boy ferret realized whom he had found.

"Lieutenant Nottaway!" cried he. "By Jupiter! this is a find not down on the bills!"

Another laugh answered Dick and then the two persons exchanged notes in a whispered conversation.

The Dodger had unexpectedly discovered Nat Nottaway, the missing police officer, and the man whom we saw unwittingly lured to doom by Sylva Semple and her mother.

It was, indeed, a singular meeting.

"The trap has swung back to its place and is ready for another victim," said the voice of the imprisoned officer.

"Did it catch you?"

"Not in the manner it served you, my boy. I was conveyed to this house at night blindfolded. This is not the trap I ran into after hearing Sylva Semple's story about her adventures the night the three cool-heads made their descent upon Manfred Moffat. This is the second dungeon I've been in since I saw you last. It is the intention of the gang to get rid of me by and by, when they have won the game they are playing just now. I'm glad you've come to keep me company."

"But we must get out!" cried Dick.

"Of course I've no wish to remain here. But what could I do without help? Feel the sides of this well. It was cemented many years ago, but dampness has rendered the cement soft. It would yield to a knife; but the knife, Dick. Ah! there's the rub."

"I have one!" was the prompt exclamation.

"I thought so. That is one reason why I told you to drop when I found you hanging above me by a frail finger-hold. Get out your knife and try the metal on the wall."

Dick was not slow to comply and a little work showed him that the blade was capable of making an impression on the cement.

"We shall cut steps to liberty," continued Officer Nottaway. "You have brought with you the key to freedom. Now let us go to work."

Dodger Dick found the knife taken from his hands, and a moment later he knew that the lost policeman was cutting into the cement.

While he worked the boy explored the underground prison with his hands, for eyes were of no avail amid the darkness that hemmed them in.

When the policeman grew tired, and the task he had assumed was not a light one, the boy detective took the knife, and continued the work.

In this way niche after niche was cut into the cement, and at last the officer could feel the covering of the dungeon.

"We are at the top," he exclaimed dropping with a cry of joy at Dick's feet. "Now I shall have the pleasure of showing the three greatest scamps unhung that he surest way to deal with a dangerous prisoner is to kill him at once."

"I'm going to help you at that," answered the Dodger. "You must not forget that I have an interest in this strange plot for a young girl's fortune. I'm always willing to share honors with any one, but I claim the right to move ahead just now."

"And you shall. You've done Nat Nottaway a service that can never be returned, and he is not the man to rob you of any laurels."

The policeman could tell Dick nothing about the house overhead.

He did not know where Fanny Moffat was, and until he saw Dick he was unaware of Sylva Semple's disappearance.

As he had said, he had been brought to the house blindfolded and closely guarded by two of the gang.

The journey had been made through the streets of New York at night and in a closed cab, so that the policeman had no idea of the location of his dungeon.

Dick thought it probable that Fanny was in the house. It might have been the young girl of 332 G— street, and not Sylva whom Larry saw at the window.

But of course all this was conjecture.

More than once during the day the boy spy ascended to the top of the walled pit and listened for sounds that might tell him something.

He wanted to know if Gaspard Hood and his companions had come back to the house, but listen as he would, not a sound was heard.

Then it was difficult to tell when night came.

The pit was so dark and the trap fitted so close, that not a ray of light stole in to indicate the march of time.

"I sha'n't be on hand to see Gaspard when he calls on Manfred Moffat," thought the young spy. "Larry will watch the house, but to whom can he report when I am here?"

"Hark!" at that moment whispered Nat Nottaway. "Somebody is moving overhead."

In a second Dick was half-way up the wall straining his ears for a repetition of the noise.

All at once the trap door moved, and before it could be opened the young ferret of New

York was crouching between the policeman and the cement.

"It is my night meal," whispered the policeman. "Sometimes when it is being lowered I hear a clock striking seven. Ah! there it goes now!"

Sure enough there came down into the pit the distant tones of a clock, and the Dodger mentally counted the strokes.

There were seven.

In a little while a small tin bucket rested on the floor at Nottaway's feet, and then the trap was closed without a word having been exchanged between the jailers and the jailed.

"Come! there's enough for two!" laughed the officer as Dick crept forward. "This is not Delmonico's, but there's nothing bad about it after all. They don't give a fellow a knife from obvious reasons. The men we are playing against are no fools, Dick."

Man and boy divided the meal in the darkness and devoured it in silence.

When it had been dispatched they waited quietly and the empty bucket was drawn up by unseen hands.

"Thanks!" smiled Dick with a gesture of politeness as the trap was closed. "I can't say that I would be willing to inhabit this place just to get free meals. I prefer the sunlight, and a run now and then under the lamps."

Slowly the moments passed to the two prisoners of the pit.

They could not hear the clock, though they knew it must have struck several times.

Above, the stillness of the tomb was abroad.

Dodger Dick wondered if the Gang of Three suspected that they had a new bird in the cage.

It was evident that they did not, else they would have made an investigation that would have discovered him.

"They must be gone," said the impatient boy, when he had landed at the officer's feet after listening a while near the top of the pit. "I am willing to risk it, anyhow."

"You can't be more eager than I am," was the reply.

"Very well. I go first, you know."

A minute after, the boy ferret was using the niches again, and when he reached the top he placed his shoulder against the trap and lifted it a mite.

The hall was dark beyond, but over the door where a transom was he could see the light of the streets.

It was night once more, and, if he had calculated truly, not far from eleven o'clock.

Surely they had waited long enough.

Dick was in the hall at last, and then he held the trap open till the burly figure of the missing policeman emerged from the dungeon of villainy.

There was no time lost in congratulations.

It was an hour for action.

The two ferrets stole from door to door, but discovered nothing which told them that the place had a single tenant besides themselves.

"The second floor now!" whispered Dodger Dick. "Larry said he saw Sylva at the window. I think I can go to the room."

The two crept up the steps and reached the landing at the top.

"Now, which way?" asked the officer.

Before Dick could reply a half-muffled cry rung in their ears, and the next instant a door flew open in their faces, barely ten feet away.

Beyond the threshold the startled friends saw the reeling figure of a female, while between them and the door was the form of a man.

"It is Wayne, the Samson of the Three!" said Dick.

The last words were still on his lips when Nat Nottaway leaped forward, and the next second he had grappled with the man with a madman's fury.

CHAPTER XVI.

A COOL VILLAIN.

FOR a brief period, reader, let us go back. Manfred Moffat sat alone in his spacious and elegantly-appointed library.

It was past the noon hour, and the house was closed to keep out the dust and the heat.

"The boy went off this morning without giving me notice," said the man to himself. "I don't know whether I acted prudently or not in leaving him in the house all night. I cannot find that he disturbed anything in the chamber he occupied. Well, there was nothing there for him to disturb. I had arranged all that beforehand," and Moffat ended with a light chuckle of satisfaction.

He had barely finished when the silvery tones of the door-bell echoed through the hall, and

then Moffat heard the step of the servant as he went to answer the ring.

In a minute the library door opened, and Gaspard Hood, the new sleuth, appeared to the man in the chair.

At once Manfred Moffat's eyes got a gleam of happy expectation as if he was almost certain that he was about to hear something of Fanny, the missing girl.

Gaspard Hood came forward with the sleek countenance and oily "good-afternoon" of the studied villain.

He was presently seated near Moffat who in his eagerness to obtain information was throwing out questions in rapid succession.

The young man assured Moffat that the trail had been found, but he went on to explain that several difficulties lay in the way of Fanny's rescue. Still, however, these would be overcome in time, and it would not be long anyhow before the mystery was cleared up.

Having raised Manfred Moffat's hopes by some adroit words, Gaspard Hood suddenly leaned forward and touched his arm.

"One thing is essential to success," said he. "I am here to say that we cannot get along without it."

"Name it," cried the eager man, who had drank in every word. "If it be in my power to furnish the one thing lacking, I am the man you're looking for."

"We must have the will!"

In an instant Manfred Moffat's face lost every particle of color.

His lips twitched nervously, and he fell back into the depths of the arm-chair with a gasp.

"I don't understand you," he said, though his appearance belied his words.

A sinister smile appeared at the shrewd rascal's mouth.

"I will be plain, then," was the reply. "I want the last will of Alfred Oswald, the father of the girl known as Fanny Moffat."

Moffat's face could get no whiter than it was, but these coolly uttered words could take his breath, which they did.

He made no answer.

"No successful step can be taken without the secret," continued Gaspard Hood. "We must have it. I am here for it, Mr. Moffat."

Then Manfred Moffat started toward his torturer with an effort, and broke out with:

"I have no such paper. Alfred Oswald, did you say? I know of no such man, I swear—"

He checked himself, for Gaspard Hood was leaning back in his chair, and his intensely black eyes, full of accusation, were riveted on his face.

"Why don't you go on?" grinned the rascal.

"You would not believe me if I did. I can see that."

"Right you are, Manfred Moffat. I would not believe you if you were to swear on a mountain of Bibles that you don't know anything about Alfred Oswald, and the will he made years ago. Come! I am here on business. I want that document."

Moffat looked again at the man.

Was this the private detective he had hired to unearth the gang by whom his house had been invaded, himself bound and gagged, and Fanny carried off?

"I thought you were in my employ," he stammered. "You came to me and offered to rescue Fanny—"

"That is not the business on hand just now," broke in Gaspard Hood. "What are you going to do, Manfred Moffat? Please do not go into another denial. Don't record a falsehood on the page that stands forever against us. We happen to know that the will I have mentioned was not destroyed. It is one of the secrets that have been in your keeping a long time. The other is that Fanny is not your child. You see we know something."

"We?" echoed the thunderstruck man, mechanically.

"That is the proper word just now," was the response. "Do you prefer exposure to surrendering the paper?"

"Then, you are not a detective?"

"I am what I am!" and the speaker laughed. "Your boy spy will get at the mystery for you, if you give him time. You don't seem to trust him altogether. That is why you took me into your employ, I presume. I may have more names than one, but that is no matter, Manfred Moffat. The will is what we want. The will or a prison cell, if nothing worse."

The man in the arm-chair sent a glance toward the book-case across the room.

"If I had known this I would not be a bird in the net now," said he.

"It is a pity we did not tell you beforehand,"

laughed Gaspard Hood. "It would have been a real accommodation no doubt. But let us wave all preliminaries, Mr. Moffat. You will please hand over the bit of paper I want."

Manfred Moffat's lips met firmly, and he seemed to grow into a statue in the chair.

The false detective eyed him curiously for a moment.

"Don't delay," he cried clutching Moffat's arm so sharply that he drew a cry over the ashen lips. "We want the will now, or we will spread the terrible truth before the eyes of this great city."

With an effort Moffat left his chair, but hesitated still.

"Wait for me here," he said to Gaspard Hood.

"No! I go where you go till the document is placed in my hands," was the quick response.

The tortured man seemed to shrink back dejected.

"Will nothing else satisfy you? Can't you name an equivalent?" he cried.

"There is no equivalent for what we want," met him in stern tones.

Manfred Moffat crossed the room to the library. He did not have to look over his shoulder to know that the merciless rascal was at his heels.

A footstep told him this.

He opened one of the glass doors and removed a book with trembling hand.

"I see!" inwardly ejaculated Gaspard Hood.

"A secret pocket in the wall behind the books. No wonder I did not find it last night."

When Manfred Moffat had taken out the volume he buried his hand in the opening, all the while watched like a hawk by the remorseless man at his elbow.

"It is not there!" welled suddenly from his throat, and then he drew his hand back empty and wheeled upon Gaspard Hood.

"No trickery!" said the villain in tones of menace.

"It was there. I swear it was in yon secret treasury so late as yesterday."

"The will of Alfred Oswald?"

"The will."

Gaspard Hood stepped forward, and his hand disappeared where Moffat's had been lost a moment before.

Beyond the books he found a secret recess, which he searched till he was convinced that it was totally empty.

"Very well," said he, looking at the bewildered man who waited for him to speak. "We will charge the loss up to you and act accordingly."

"To me?" was the instant echo. "You cannot do that. I did not remove the paper. I saw it last where it is not now."

"Mr. Moffat, don't you sometimes enact the role of a somnambulist?"

The tenant of Number 332 started.

"I occasionally walk in my sleep," he confessed.

"I thought so. You cannot say now that you did not remove the will."

There was no answer.

"Who shared the secret of its hiding-place with you?"

"No one."

"Not Fanny even?"

"No, sir."

"You say it was in the hidden recess yesterday?"

"It was."

"Who slept in your house last night?"

All at once a singular cry parted Moffat's lips. He had thought of Dodger Dick!

"Look here! you had a guest last night—one perhaps who came without invitation, and who left without good-by. What do you say to this, sir?"

"If I had a guest it was a person who could not know anything about yon recess."

"Ah! let us see. Who crossed your threshold last night?"

Again Manfred Moffat hesitated.

He did not want to betray the Boy Vidocq.

"You will not tell, eh?" smiled Gaspard Hood. "You want to keep the name of your confederate, do you? Keep it then; but don't blame us when the blow falls."

With a look that spoke as much as his tongue had done, the villain walked toward the door.

"It is all false!" rung out behind him. "I have no confederate. I was robbed last night by somebody. Take me and expose me to the world, but for Heaven's sake, let me have back the child who has twined herself about my heart even though she is not of my blood. Give me Fanny for one day, and then do your worst!"

The look Manfred Moffat got was a look of ice.

CHAPTER XVII.

MOTHER STURGEON'S CATCH.

"I FETCHED him to terms, but after all lost the prize," growled the man who went down the front steps of Manfred Moffat's residence a short time after the scenes just described.

It was Gaspard Hood, as he was called, and the rascal was in no good humor.

Not far away Dodger Dick's young spy Larry was watching the house with the zeal of a true sleuth, and when he saw Gaspard come out and walk away, he followed at once.

Gaspard did not go back to the house which he was occupying with the other members of the gang of gold.

He believed that the Boy Vidocq was the person who had been Manfred Moffat's guest, and with this notion came the belief that the will had fallen into his hands.

But not with Moffat's consent, of course.

Larry followed Gaspard Hood from place to place pretty much the balance of the day.

At no time did the fellow join his companions.

He reminded his young tracker of a dog that hunts alone, and it was plain that Gaspard was looking up something or somebody very important.

At last he popped into a building occupied then, as now, by a number of so-called attorneys who never question the honesty of their clients, and who take any and every case they can for the fee alone.

Let us follow Gaspard.

He mounted a flight of very dusty steps to the second floor where he found the signs of these sharks of the law.

He went straight to a certain door as if he had been there before, and in a moment he confronted a hatchet-faced man of forty-five.

This individual greeted Gaspard with a familiarity that betokened intimate acquaintance, and the two men were seated close together at a table.

"Well, I failed," began the false detective.

This announcement threw the lawyer back and drew from him a stare and a cry.

"When did you play your hand?" he asked.

"Just now. I am fresh from the field."

"Couldn't you force the document from him?"

"He could not deliver it."

"Pshaw! he has it in his possession—"

"I beg your pardon," broke in Gaspard, smiling. "A man cannot give up that which he does not have at the time. He had the will, but he lost it last night."

"Last night?" was the sudden echo.

"He did."

"How?"

"It was stolen."

"Impossible!"

"I am satisfied of it."

"Then, in Heaven's name, who is the thief?"

"I have an opinion."

"Out with it."

"You know we have not yet entrapped the boy ferret of the docks."

"What! has the document fallen into his hands?" was the lawyer's exclamation.

"I can think of nothing else."

For a few seconds the two men looked at each other with silence between them.

"Why haven't we caged the young rat before this?" cried the lawyer at length. "But, after all, why would he want the paper? What does he know about Alfred Oswald and Manfred Moffat's secret?"

"You forget that the strange disappearance of Oswald is one of the current stories at police gatherings, though it happened years ago. The boy circulates among the coppers of New York; he knows them all. I believe he passed last night in Manfred Moffat's house."

"And was there when Wayne and yourself ransacked the premises?"

"Yes."

"This is simply astounding," ejaculated the lawyer. "What is to be done?"

"First, try to find the boy and the will."

"Failing in finding the paper, what?"

"Then your genius will come in play," laughed Gaspard Hood.

"That means a new will—one to suit our purposes. We don't want to take this step till we have exhausted all other means."

"No. The old will, if it can be found. A new one made old if we can't get the genuine."

"That is it. But won't Manfred Moffat fight us?"

Gaspard fell back in his chair and laughed in his companion's face.

"That fellow fight us? Not for the world!" he cried. "Ere this he has probably buried himself out of the world. He knows that we know everything, and I told him pretty plainly

that he could keep his mouth shut or inspect the inside of Sing Sing. Of these two things you know what Manfred Moffat will do."

"I think I could guess," was the response.

It was now dark on the streets where the light of the lamps did not fall, and when Gaspard Hood left the little office the city clocks were striking eight.

He had just left the third man of the villainous trio, a person who has not figured individually in the course of our story.

He was one of the pair who did the work in Manfred Moffat's house the night it was plundered of Fanny.

His name was Nathan Noland, and he was ostensibly a small lawyer, but his legal cloak covered a multitude of petty rascalities, so that he was, in truth, a cool, shrewd villain, who was as deep as his comrades in the scheme against Manfred Moffat and his supposed child.

If Gaspard Hood had gone from the office to the house where we last saw Dodger Dick, he might have prevented the scene we left there to go back to G— street and its citizen.

He proceeded to that part of the city occupied by Mother Sturgeon and the Dodger.

Larry, who still followed Gaspard, now knew that Dodger Dick was the person looked for, and he resolved to warn his young friend of the spy on his track.

To do this he entered the house by the back entrance, and surprised Mother Sturgeon in her little room.

Dick was away.

"So my boy is wanted by one of the villains, is he?" cried the woman, as her eyes seemed to flash. "Mehbe he is one of the two who served me the merciless trick a few nights ago. Where is he, Larry?"

"Probably on guard outside," said the boy.

"Watching the house for Dick, eh?"

"Yes."

For a moment the woman did not speak.

"I want that man!" suddenly cried she. "I want to show him that age has not taken away my strength."

"You don't want him to come in, do you?" asked the boy.

"I want him nowhere else! Right here would I turn the tables on the scamp! He must not find Dick. The gang is desperate—the boy has escaped it so long. Now, if I could only lay my hands on the wolf on guard outside!"

Mother Sturgeon stood before Larry with her hands clasped, and the boy could see the workings of her lips in the excitement of the moment.

"I am going to decoy that man up here!" she went on.

"He is a fox, Mother Sturgeon."

"Foxes have been caught!" was the prompt retort. "Go down and find him on his post. Then come back to me."

Struck by the determination of Dick's foster-mother, Larry withdrew, and in a little had sighted the man he had dogged for half a day.

"He doesn't want to see me again. I'm sure of that," said the old lady when the boy had reported. "He will want to look through my house, though, if he could know that I was not in. The Gang of Three knows that unless they silence Dick soon the game is up. That is why one of them is down yonder now."

Five minutes later Mother Sturgeon in her usual dress emerged from the hallway that led to her abode, and walked away with no effort at secrecy.

She passed a man who stood in the shadows of a building, a man whom she did not appear to notice at all.

"Hello! the tigress herself!" exclaimed this person as Mother Sturgeon flitted past. "The house is clear for me now. If Dick has the document he has hid it on the premises. A shrewd little play might get it, and then we would be armed for the last grand assault. The old woman isn't coming back, either, that is, not soon. She has vanished round the corner. Good-night, Mother Sturgeon."

The man in the doorway occupied his quarters for five minutes longer before he moved; then he left the place quietly and went up the dark stairway used so often by the Boy Vidocq.

Once before, perhaps, he had climbed the same steps on another mission.

If so, he knew just where to find the door leading to Mother Sturgeon's abode.

The door was shut but not locked—a queer oversight on the woman's part, he thought, and after listening a few moments he opened it noiselessly and walked in.

Mother Sturgeon had left the gas burning, but not brilliantly. Still, there was light enough to reveal the room and its plain appointments.

"Now, where shall I begin?" Gaspard Hood asked himself in audible tones as he looked around. "Maybe I'd better try the boy's room first."

He took one step toward the door of Dodger Dick's apartment—no more.

All at once the door opened in his face, and out of the room sprung with a cry of triumph Mother Sturgeon herself.

"Ha! the gudgeon took the bait!" she laughed.

"I knew he would, ba, ha, ha!" and Gaspard Hood, bewildered by the startling apparition, was forced backward into a chair and held down by a pair of hands that seemed to possess the strength of the Queen of the Amazons.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOST FOUND.

"HOODWINDED like a ninny!" mentally exclaimed Gaspard when he took in his situation and saw Mother Sturgeon victorious. "The vixen won't let up now, and I will have to suffer for the trick I played on her some time ago; that is, if she identifies me, and I'm afraid she will."

Meanwhile he was held down in the chair by Dick's foster-mother, and her looks again told him that he had been neatly tricked, and that the victor was proud of her achievement.

"Bring the ropes here, Larry," suddenly called out Mother Sturgeon, and to Gaspard's surprise a boy appeared with a good stout clothes-line on his arm.

"What are you going to do, woman?" cried Gaspard drawing back indignantly.

"Make sure of you till Dick comes home," was the reply.

"You have no right to detain me here. This is a high-handed outrage, and one that will be looked after by the proper authorities."

"Of course!" laughed Mother Sturgeon. "The proper authorities will soon investigate something else. It was not a 'high handed outrage,' when two men entered my house and left me, as they supposed, to die a terrible death in my chair. That was a part of the game you will say, perhaps. Well, so is this."

Gaspard Hood subsided.

He knew he could not compete with the cutting tongue of the woman he had fallen in with, and with the best grace possible he submitted quietly while Larry bound him firmly in the chair.

When the operation was completed he could not move, and was as much a prisoner as though iron walls surrounded him.

A few minutes later Larry quietly took his departure, and the false detective was alone with Mother Sturgeon.

Every now and then the pair would exchange looks in which there was not much friendship, and Gaspard tried several times to draw the woman into conversation, but without success.

"If Wayne knew of this he would be here and get me out of pickle," he thought. "I would like to see him walk in and throttle the Jezebel into whose trap I walked like a fool. This time it would be a throttling that would mean something. But I'm afraid Wayne won't come."

Wayne, the Samson of the Gang of Three did not come.

While Gaspard sat tied in the chair some thrilling scenes were occurring at a certain place where we left Dodger Dick several chapters back.

The reader will recollect that when the Boy Vidocq and Officer Nottaway escaped from the pit under the floor, they began to search the house for Sylva Semple and Fanny Moffat.

It was in the midst of this work when a sharp cry was heard, and the opening of a door ahead disclosed the figure of a stalwart man—Wayne, the giant.

Nat Nottaway sprung directly at this person, and Dodger Dick saw the two in close embrace almost before he could realize what had happened.

It was a close match between the two men.

Wayne knew at once who his antagonist was, and perhaps he caught a glimpse of the boy sleuth.

At any rate, he exerted all the strength he had at command, but Officer Nottaway, stirred by the indignities he had suffered at the hands of the Three, could not be overcome.

He forced Wayne against the wall, and there administered such a choking that the big man gasped for mercy.

Before this victory Dodger Dick had entered the room at hand, and there found the fainting form of a young girl on the floor.

Bending over it with breathless excitement, he uttered a startling cry.

He had found Fanny Moffat!

This discovery was somewhat unexpected, but none the less welcome, for he had expected to find Sylva Semple.

"We want the other girl, too," he said, wheeling upon Wayne, who was closely guarded by Nottaway.

"What other girl?" asked the man.

"Come! no pretended ignorance now. Where is Sylva Semple?"

A fierce look leaped up in the rascal's eyes.

"Find her!" he said, madly.

"We will, and if she has been harmed, woe to the Gang of Three!" answered the boy. "She never penned the letter I received by the hands of the street Arab."

The prisoner gave him a look which was not hard to interpret, and turned suddenly to Nottaway.

"Why do you let a rat like that lead you?" he asked with a sneer.

"He is a fox," was the retort. "He has scented you fellows at any rate. Not only that, but he has solved the famous Oswald riddle. Did you ever hear of that, sir?"

The man started violently.

"The Oswald riddle? What is that?" he asked.

"It affects the girl yonder," and Nottaway glanced at Fanny who was coming out of the swoon. "The will of missing Alfred Oswald has come to light at last, and we police won't look for the lost man any more."

"Who found the will?" cried Wayne.

"The young fox yonder."

In an instant Dodger Dick was the recipient of a look which would have killed if looks possessed that power.

"Yes, I have the document," he said, coming toward Wayne. "You and Gaspard Hood failed to find it last night though your hands at one time were within a few inches of its hiding-place."

"Where were you, rat of the river?"

"Nearer than you thought at the time," smiled Dick.

"Oh, well, we took the chances," and Wayne fell back and looked at the young sleuth. "You must not think that by playing the hand you have, you can save one dollar for Manfred Moffat. The truth will turn him into the streets a beggar."

"No one wants to save him if he is guilty."

"Guilty?" laughed the prisoner. "If that man is not guilty of a foul crime, then there is no guilt on earth."

Leaving Nat Nottaway to watch the chief of the Gang of Three, Dodger Dick began to search the house for Sylva Semple.

In one of the upper rooms which was locked and bolted he heard a noise, and then a voice at the door.

"That is the girl!" exclaimed the young detective, and then he put his lips to the latch.

"Sylva?" he called.

An exclamation of joy was the answer.

"That is the boy detective!" cried a voice inside. "The fox has beaten the wolves. Now I shall see mother again!"

And Dick promised deliverance and went away.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FINISH.

MANFRED MOFFAT sat once more in his library, but this time the door leading into the hall was locked.

It was the same night of Fanny's recovery, and the hour was late.

On the table before the man lay a lot of papers, and in the grate, within arm's reach, a fire burned, although it was a night in summer.

Among the papers stood a small vial half-filled with a colorless liquid. The label had been partly scratched off, but enough was left to give a shrewd person a clew to the contents.

Manfred Moffat was looking over one of the documents when the bell tinkled in the hall.

He started and looked up.

"No admission to-night," said he. "This is my hour. They can have all of to-morrow in which to do their worst. I see wherein I have been duped. I took into my employ as sleuth the moving spirit of the conspiracy—the very man whom I should have kept out of my house. If I had told the boy all at the beginning I might have fared better; but I had kept the secret so long that I thought it would be safe to keep it longer. The three merciless men will accomplish their purpose. They will win the cool game they have been playing, and I—well, I will go to the wall. They shall not stand me before the public as the possessor of another man's property, and another man's child."

Again the door-bell sent its music into the library.

Manfred Moffat smiled as the sounds died out and went back to his work, but not without a glance at the vial on the table.

Five minutes later there came a distinct knock on the library door.

The man at the table sprung up with a quick cry. He stared wildly at the portal and stood like a statue in the middle of the room.

"Mr. Moffat!" came in a voice from the hall.

"The boy, by all that's holy! How did he get in?" And Manfred went toward the door as if some irresistible force drove him forward.

He unlocked the portal with quivering fingers, and as it was pulled open Dodger Dick stepped in.

"You keep things locked up now, I see," he said, with a smile, as he caught Moffat's eye. "I had to come at this hour because I am on important business. We have them all."

"All?" echoed Manfred Moffat, in a gasp.

"Yes; Wayne Pollard, Gaspard Hood, your sweet-scented detective, and Nat Noland, the law sharp of the gang."

"But not Fanny?"

"And Fanny! The victory is complete, Mr. Moffat. Besides the men and those who have been in their hands, we have also the will of Alfred Oswald."

Manfred Moffat colored and then turned pale. Sinking into his chair again, he remained silent for a moment.

"Hear the words of a man who speaks the truth in the shadow of death," he said, solemnly.

"Alfred Oswald, Fanny's father, left his will in my keeping before he disappeared. I wanted money then. I saw my opportunity, and could not resist temptation. I broke my word of faith with Oswald. I kept what should have been his child's. I raised her as my own. She is as near my heart as she could be to a father's. All I am supposed to possess belongs to her. Her father's wealth has increased tenfold. That is what the Gang of Three was playing for. Heaven knows how they knew so much, but they knew! I am ready to go to the bitter end, Dodger Dick. There is no blood on my hands. To the best of my knowledge, Alfred Oswald was not murdered. You can show me up as the violator of a sacred trust. I will let Fanny judge me."

"She shall," was the boy's reply. "In the first place, we will deal with the Gang of Three. You must take your chances."

"I will!"

And Manfred Moffat caught the vial from the table and flung it into the fire.

The stern law played part of the game out. It dealt mercilessly with the Gang of Three, each one getting a long term in Sing Sing.

It helped Manfred Moffat restore to Fanny her father's fortune, and it finally made the young girl the bride of Roland Rollins, the book-keeper.

Dick Sly, who had the pleasure of escorting Sylva Semple back to her mother, received a most handsome reward at Fanny's hands, a part of which he bestowed upon the little girl of R— street.

Nat Nottaway went back to his duties, where he is to this day, while the Boy Vidocq is waiting for "something important" to turn up.

THE END.

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